

# Fast Track *to*

# *The* SOCIAL WEB

*Presenting The Most Popular  
Online Networking Sites*

**Introduction**

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**Finding Friends**

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**Media Sharing**

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**Hobbies, Taste & Special Interest**

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**Business Networking**

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**Educational Sites**

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**Bookmarking Sites**

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**Going Mobile**

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**Weird Networking Sites**

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# Fast Track to **The Social Web**

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August 2007

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# Wired Together

So you've been getting all these e-mail invitations from pals and colleagues and uncles, and you're wondering whether you should take out the time to click the link and fill in a boring form. Sometimes the person is a vague memory; sometimes, the site has a ridiculous name. So should you click those links and sign up? What's in it for you? Thinking about that got us into writing what follows

We aren't sure: some of you have heard a lot about social networking sites and the general phenomenon, and possibly are members of many; for some of you, it might be a new thing, and you're wondering what precisely "Join my network on ZongaBonga!!" means. (Aside: what wastebasket do they get all these site names from?)

Well, in either case, we've got something for you here. We introduce the phenomenon—yes, it's nothing short of that—of social networking; and then, we tell you in this book about what's out there, which sites you might want to join, and so forth. In short, we're trying to tell you: get online, get social, have fun, talk business, flirt, and anything you can think of.

Another little aside: we believe a majority of you have heard the word "Orkut," and in a way, we're building upon that. Orkut is just one of hundreds.

A table of contents follows, listing out all the categories of social networking sites that exist—there are special interest sites, sites for social bookmarking, for finding friends, and many, many more. One look and you might just be amazed how much of a social Web it really is.

It's a phenomenon, we said, but it goes beyond. Networking and interacting with people on the Internet is the way ahead: we're getting more and more virtual. It's now normal to consider virtual beings your friends and colleagues. Something your father just won't understand. Don't bother explaining.

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# An Introduction To Social Networking



**T**he sheer popularity of online socialising is what has made us think we should bring you this book, and in the course of the following chapters, we'll be walking you through all you need to know to get socialising and make hundreds of friends online!



## 1.1 Social Networking: A Little History

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You see it everywhere: for time immemorial, homo sapiens has huddled together in groups. We are gregarious animals, and we've become the dominant species on the planet much because of our habit of sharing information—and our opposable thumbs (to keep the biology majors silent).

So sit back and forget about the Internet for a while, and think about it: it all started when barely-human apes learnt to hunt in packs. Next was the discovery of fire, and our ancestors gathered in front of fires for a millennium after that. Then came cities and ships, and we traversed the globe, still huddled together for warmth and that general feeling of goodness. We've hugged each other excitedly at sports events, consoled each other in times of misery, and continually found new ways to form cuddly, warm groups of like-minded individuals. There's always been a group even the squarest of us can fit into—sort of like in a college canteen: the jocks sit together; the popular ones preen themselves at one table while the unpopular ones look on in awe; the nerds challenge each other with Mensa trivia; the anti-establishmentals are busy spray-painting the loos. You get the picture...

Then came the computer.

A PC was, and is, a very personal gadget (perhaps, just perhaps, that's why they call it a Personal Computer!). When it first became popular sometime in the '90s, it was something you could use for hours or days—but always alone. Gaming was addictive, Windows was fun to use, and MS Office let you get work done so much faster than when you still used books. We got addicted. Problem was, we ended up feeling cold and empty—a PC was fun, but it was still a dumb machine (no matter how many times it beat you at chess), and we yearned for the interaction that only other people could give us.

Then came the Internet. A far cry from the lonely machine, the PC was now able to put you in touch with people from any-

where at all. It started with e-mail: if you knew a person's e-mail address, you could send him or her a letter in an instant regardless of geography. Snail mail suddenly seemed this quaint little rustic tool that only tech illiterate people and the elderly used to communicate.

Then, in accordance with the laws of human nature, our tendency to want to socialise asked for more. Thus the platform was set: we wanted instantaneous communication, and not just with the people we knew—we wanted to make new friends from various countries.

It was this need that prompted Jarkko Oikarinen, an employee of the Department of Information Processing Science in the University of Oulu, Finland, to sit down and write out the code for the first ever IRC client and server in 1988. IRC stands for Internet Relay Chat, and basically, it's a tool that let you chat over the Net. Prior to this, the only way you could communicate with others was through the BBS (Bulletin Board System) that was around before "the Internet" came in.

IRC was amazing at the time, and got people really excited. You could actually connect to a server, see hundreds of people online and then chat with them (gasp!). As early as July 1990, there were as many as 40 servers running worldwide, each with an average of 12 users. This meant that as much as a hundred users could be online at once and chat *in real-time*.

There's plenty more to the history of IRC, but we won't get into it here. Suffice it to say that popularity shot up, especially during the first Gulf War of 1991, when IRC was found to be the best way to send information across the world in the shortest span of time. It was in 1991 that the IRC network first saw over 300 people online at the same time.

Since IRC had the concept of channels (basically chat rooms), it wasn't long before people started creating channels based on

interests. This is perhaps where the world got their first glimpse of “social networking.” There were hundreds of like-minded individuals talking and sharing information based on interests—in real-time. When file sharing came into IRC, it became a popular P2P activity, with people sharing information and music, making friends, and even visiting each other offline in the “real world,” so to speak.

Next came all the Instant Messengers, notably ICQ. Chat rooms and one-on-one chats made it even easier to build friendships with people all over the world. It obviously wasn’t long before Web sites took the cue, and dating sites came up. The most social and popular activity, finding prospective significant others, became a lot easier, with dating sites (matrimonial sites for India) going global.

As early as 1995, the first social networking site came up. Classmates.com was intelligently targeted at anyone who hadn’t kept in touch with school mates, and needless to say, became popular. This was followed by SixDegrees.com in 1997; it was based on the principle that everyone on planet Earth was separated only by six acquaintances.

Social networking as we know it really took off with Friendster.com, launched in 2002.

Today, social networking accounts for the majority of surfing done globally. Sites such as MySpace, Orkut, Hi5, Windows Live Spaces, Xanga, Facebook, Friendster, Classmates, Bebo, and many, many more, all boast of millions of users. MySpace, in particular, boasts of almost a whopping 200 million registered users! Orkut is very popular amongst us Indians, while more Indian sites seem to be coming up by the month.

## 1.2 Types Of Socialising

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We've come a long way from the days of IRC and the BBS. Today, the Internet is just a part of our lives, not something that awes. Instant Messaging and chat were once a novelty; today, we just expect to be able to use these. On a different note, social networking isn't just as simple as making friends. There's a purpose to everything we do these days.

And so, when we network, we have a specific reason to do so. Some of us are just bored and looking for something interesting to read, and that's where blogs come in. Blogging sites are also very much social sites, because the very concept is to share thoughts, ideas, and musings with the world. This results in comments from people who read your posts and your replies to them—and thus you have interaction. So perhaps it's only fair to list blogging down as social networking in its most basic form. We've covered everything you need to know in our earlier *Fast Track to Blogging*, so we don't need to dwell on it further.

The idea behind social networking, strictly speaking, is to grow your list of friends, but as all working professionals know, we have varied levels and types of friends. First come our buddies (our *yaars*), and these are people you just love to hang out with, share thoughts and ideas, and all this is generally casual and playful interaction. Most popular social networking sites involve making such friends. Then there's sexual attraction and flirting and all that, and dating sites are what fill that need. However, most popular social networking sites, too, offer some way of showing amorous interest in other members—that's what all the Flirt, Add To Crush List, Send Flowers, etc., buttons are for. There are tons of adult sites as well, targeted at sexually liberated adults, helping them find each other across the globe. For obvious reasons, we aren't going to talk about such sites.

A very important social activity is work-related networking. Though there's the opportunity to engage in business networking

on most social networking sites, it's clearly much less desirable than, say, a site that's meant purely for business partnerships. It's this wish to separate work from fun that has made sites such as LinkedIn and Ryze such successes. Apart from just finding people in your line of work and making business contacts, business networking sites let you make contacts from across all industry verticals, and expose you to much more than your normally closed little world. Also, it's great to get to know alternative ways of functioning, personally and on a company level, and learn of interesting strategies and ideas. We'll look closely at business networking later.

Although dating, friends, and business takes care of the majority of online networking, there are still thousands of sites that offer none of these primarily. Forums, for example, are primarily used to exchange information, waste time, share news, express opinions, and more. Then there are sites such as Wikipedia and Yahoo! Answers, which depend solely on the people who use the site, so they are very social and community-driven.

## 1.3 Etiquette And Security

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Social networking is very much like real life in the sense that you're still dealing with real people. All the etiquette you enforce upon yourself in real life when dealing with friends or colleagues should be put into use when networking online as well.

There are no fixed rules; we cannot write out a rulebook for you. But in general, sites such as MySpace, Freindster, Facebook, and Orkut can be considered a little more relaxed than, say, Ryze and LinkedIn. So although you can go about joking with your buddies in Orkut, doing the same on LinkedIn will lose you some business.

For the more informal sites, here's a little set of rules to follow:

1. Choose a good nickname (if you'd rather not use your real name) and try not to choose one that sounds retarded.

2. If you want to invite more of your friends to the site, don't just dump your entire contact list and send a mass invite. Keep it personal, and keep work friends / colleagues for business networking sites and your personal friends for more casual sites.
3. Make sure to join groups that interest you so you can find people with similar tastes.
4. If you ask to add someone to your list, do it just once. Persisting is not just irritating, it's also rude, and can even be considered cyber-stalking.
5. Try and help people who ask for your help.
6. Remember to voice your opinions and take part in discussions with people in your friend list.
7. Don't just start adding people you don't know as friends—it will make you seem desperate.
8. Watch your language and steer clear of flame wars (insulting someone you don't like).

These are just the basics of etiquette online. If you conduct yourself with dignity, you shouldn't go wrong.

Apart from being polite, you also have to be careful of who you make friends with. Security is an important aspect of social networking. We'll give you another little list here:

1. If you're joining a network for fun, don't use your real name. Some people prefer to use a false address; we'd suggest not putting any addresses or personal details such as your mobile phone number.
2. Once you're done with your profile, make sure to set the right access masks for different user groups.
3. You don't *have* to be friends with people you don't really like.
4. Don't save your password on a shared computer.

Now that you have a basic idea of how to behave and stay safe, you're ready to continue with this book. Just remember to keep it social.

# Finding Friends



**T**he *raison d'être* of a social networking site is to enable people to link up. Since most of us use the Internet extensively we have come to rely on such sites mainly to keep in touch with old friends and discover new ones, which would be infeasible if we went about it in the old way, owing to our hectic schedules. Another big draw of online social networking is that a friend in, say, Timbuctoo is as accessible as the guy next door. In this section we bring you a review of 12 networking sites. Read on to get a sneak peek into their innards.

## 2.1 www.myspace.com

The big daddy in this genre, no other site has received as much publicity as MySpace has. It is like the Oracle of data storage, or the Cisco of network devices. It has both ardent fans as well as vitriolic critics. It was originally started

by Tom Andersen and Chris DeWolfe in November 2003 (though there is some dispute) and acquired by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in July 2005 for US \$580 million.



As a social networking site MySpace is a one-stop shop. You can add pictures, write blogs, make friends, upload music and video, organise offline events with your online buddies and do gazillions of other things (shave Britney and get a ringtone). But MySpace's USP is that unlike most other sites which deal in social networking, it offers you complete leeway to modify and customise your profile page. You get to decide which colours and fonts to keep, what apps to embed and what should be your profile's look and feel. These effects are achieved by copy pasting simple HTML and CSS code. The MySpace Profile Editor can be used to good effect.

Once you have tweaked your profile to your heart's content, get cracking. Whenever you get yourself a new account, Tom Andersen (the founder) gets added to your friend list by default. Since he remains a friend in a majority of the lists, this is a place to start hunting for friends in case you don't know anybody at MySpace. Of course you can idly browse through profiles from the main page and latch on to somebody interesting. And if you have friends already then it's a walk in the park. As you start developing your contacts and making new friends you will find



that your world revolves around it. We wager it's going to keep you extremely busy.

Communication is through the usual suspects: messages, bulletins and IMs. The groups section is a hot and happening place where people gather together based on their interests and talk—the same goes for the forum area. Events are things happening in real life—from a rock concert to a picnic

which are either featured on the site or can be organised by you. MySpace has separate featured areas for film makers, musicians and comedians. In fact to add music to your profile you have to go to MySpace Music and select music from there. It might sound restrictive but you have got almost every band and artist to choose from. For videos you have a little more freedom. At MySpace TV you still have to select from the featured videos in different categories like comedy, sports, entertainment, etc., but if you are hot on a video you can submit its link for it to be considered for featuring. Classifieds and jobs are also useful.



A slick web site with slicker content

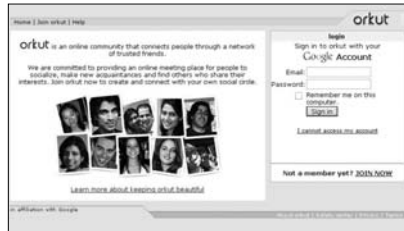
MySpace has a lot of detractors, and most of them have a valid point or two. As the site design goes, the anything goes philosophy followed by the users while designing their profiles is reported to cause problems from messed up views to browser freezes to music and video starting up simultaneously. Even more serious are reports that MySpace is a haven for phishers and spyware. Safety for underage users also remains a concern, with online predators using devious means to contact young people. In fact MySpace does not conform to W3C standards of valid HTML usage.

Love it or hate it, you cannot escape MySpace. With MySpace

being the fourth most popular site ever, with a user base touching about 200 million and available in languages like French, Spanish, German, Japanese and Chinese, the juggernaut rolls on. So prominent is MySpace that both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have official MySpace profiles and these provide a great tool for publicity.

## 2.2 www.orkut.com

Ask the GenNext in India which site they visit when they connect to the Internet 90 per cent would answer: Orkut. Orkut's popularity in places like India and Brazil (most Orkut users are Brazilians) and its anonymity in the US (where it is domiciled) is a mystifying puzzle which seems to obey the law of unintended consequences (seems a good doctoral thesis topic for sociologists).



Started in January 2004 by Google employee Orkut Buyukkokten, a Turkish engineer, Orkut was launched keeping the US market in view. But the service actually found its feet in Brazil, with the word Orkut ingrained into the national consciousness. In fact Brazilians, and to some degree Asians like Indians and Pakistanis are huge on Orkut. In its intended market Orkut is overshadowed by similar sites like MySpace and Facebook. The top three in Orkut by demographics are Brazil (56%), US (19%) and India (15%) while visits country wise are Brazil (72.5%), India (16.1%) and US (2.7%). This second bit of data is more reliable than the first because users can put any country as their place of birth / residence.

Features on Orkut are no doubt known to most readers, but for those who came in late, Orkut offers a very friendly and unclut-

tered interface in the tradition of Google. In fact unlike MySpace there is no provision to customise your profile. Even though it seems a little monotonous, the eye sometimes yearns for uniformity. In fact Orkut's interface is both its biggest advantage as well as disadvantage. People can be added to your Friend list simply by clicking on Add as Friend tab in their profile, though the request has to be accepted. People can be banned by adding to the Ignore list. Then there is stuff like Fans and Crush list which are great to dabble in when you are tired of twiddling your thumbs.

Members can communicate through scraps: think of it like writing e-mails without having to fill in all those pesky details.

These scraps are

publicly viewable. There is also a privately viewable Message option which is rarely used. People come together in groups which are called Communities. Each Community has an owner, and may have a moderator and are grouped by common interest. Polls were introduced in 2007 for every community. Apart from polls Google has introduced a slew of new features. The Profile Album was there from the start; you could upload maximum of 12 photos with captions optional, now with Google acquiring YouTube, it has become possible to upload videos from YouTube or Google video by attaching the link. The video plays inline. Google Talk can be launched from within Orkut and the online status of your Google Talk's contacts can be known real time, if both they and you have signed in using Google accounts. Profile views since Feb '06 (the numbers tends to massage your ego) as well as the names of five most recent profile visitors are displayed. Two brand new features, RSS feeds for your blogs as well as Orkut's very own blog open to all users is going to warm the cockles of the hearts of avid bloggers.

**Bad, bad server. No donut for you.**

Unfortunately, the orkut.com server has acted out in an unexpected way. Hopefully, it will return to its helpful self if you try again in a few minutes.

It's likely that the server will behave this way on occasion during the coming months. We apologize for the inconvenience and for our server's lack of consideration for others.

**Orkut's server giving up its ghost**

Orkut has had its fair share of controversies. It has been banned in Saudi Arabia and Iran. In India Orkut has been the target of political parties like the Shiv Sena and has also come under the scrutiny of the courts for featuring anti-India communities. In Brazil charges of propagation of racism by users have hit the portal. In the area of security the site is vulnerable to cross scripting attacks, phishing attacks, malware and viruses. As of writing this, Orkut still has unfixed vulnerabilities regarding session management and authentication. These vulnerabilities could prove fatal if Orkut is used through cybercafés because sessions remain active even 24 hours after logging out and they can be hijacked. Bad news for most Indians, but it does not look like Orkut is getting any less popular.

## 2.3 www.facebook.com

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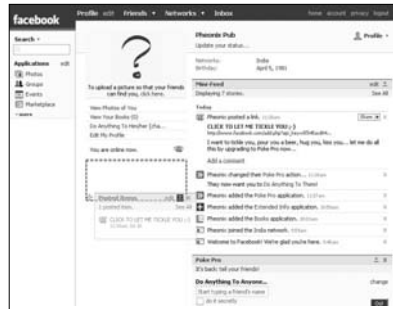
The leader in social networking space until MySpace usurped that position, Facebook was originally established as an exclusive social networking site for college students. Only members with valid college or university e-mail IDs could join the network, though it is now available to anybody with a valid e-mail address. It remains the most popular site for college students, with over 25 million out of a total of 28 million Facebook members worldwide still in college.



Founded in February 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg from Harvard University, it quickly captured the imagination of the campus populations who wanted an exclusive place of their own. Membership within a year ballooned to almost a million with almost all colleges and universities in the US having a presence. Soon a high school version was introduced where students from high schools and junior colleges could be invited in. In September 2006

Facebook became accessible to anyone, leading to considerable heartburn among its original constituency.

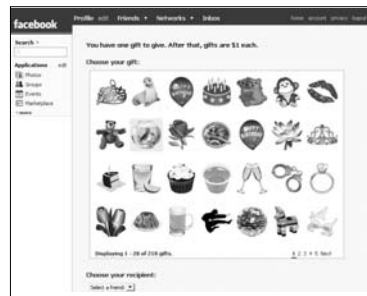
Like its competitor MySpace, Facebook users can modify their profile layout but cannot add HTML / CSS or Flash. Hence the pages are tightly integrated and take less time to load than most MySpace profiles. Privacy measures are pretty decent as members can view the profiles of only their friends. However they can do a global search of the people on the site. Networks and groups are two separate, though almost similar areas. Facebook allows you to be a part of a network of colleges, high schools and workplaces, all grouped geographically. Over and above that you can join networks based on your country. Last time we checked the college network section for India had support for all the IIMs and the IITs as well as some other institutions. These networks are added on request by users, so anyone can have networks around their region, colleges, high schools and workplaces. Groups are places where people having common interest hang out, like communities in Orkut.



Modifying your profile



A group on Facebook



The Facebook Gift Shop

Apart from these features Facebook allows you to embed functionalities called applications in your profile. Applications are nifty gadgets which do small things like listing the books you have read to modifying the fields of your profile to include newer options. Most of these are designed by individuals and third party developers.

If you have information on Facebook that you want to share in other Web sites use the Facebook badge, and even design a new one if you are not satisfied with the default. Mini-Feeds on your profile is like an activity log; it keeps track of everything that you have done during your stay at the site. Pokes are a way on Facebook to break the ice or to be used as reminders, though they have many other connotations for different users. Facebook users can download a custom toolbar for Firefox 2.0 or add a Facebook search engine to FF / IE7.0's search box. Marketplace is a newly added feature where you can conduct business. Joining Facebook entitles you to a free gift which is a thumbnail, but subsequent gifts have to be paid for.

Joining and registering were no brainers, but what really ate up our time was the amount of searching we had to do to get to some areas. The help sections were exhaustive and once you spend some time on the site you will get the hang of it. For non members it is definitely worth a visit, if only for a change of scene from your normal networking haunts.

## 2.4 [www.spaces.live.com](http://www.spaces.live.com)

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Earlier known as MSN Spaces, Windows Live Spaces is Microsoft's foray into social networking. And when Microsoft does something, they are almost like communists. They do things big. So is it with Live Spaces. With a user base of over



120 million spread over the world in 50 countries, Microsoft has leveraged its presence in the e-mail segment (users can sign in using Hotmail, Messenger or Passport accounts). Very few social networking sites have such a ready-made pool. And unlike the majority of Microsoft's products, membership here is free. It was launched early in 2004.



the Windows Live Spaces homepage

Users not having the three sign in accounts can directly register for a hotmail account and sign in. The interface uses Silverlight technology and looks stunning. Best viewed with Internet Explorer 5 and above, this site has issues with other browsers like Firefox and Safari. Tabs from the homepage make for efficient navigation around the site. Moving around to different area and exploring the site makes it a fun experience in itself, probably because of the aesthetics.

Once you have your fill of looking at the eye candy on display you can get down to the business of editing your Space. You can import and synchronize your friend lists from Windows Live Messenger and Windows Live Mail. The people who are friends on Spaces automatically become friends on Messenger. If you are in a mood



Gadgets on Windows Live Spaces

to experiment further go ahead and fill your profile with bells and whistles. And there are lots to choose from. There are thousands of gadgets which do anything from predicting your future to showing the time of the day that you can add to your Spaces. Most of

these gadgets are not designed in house, rather they are developed by third party developers.

There are a lot of themes and colours available, as well as the option to change the templates. All these features are also referred to as “Power Toys”. Every time your contacts upload their Spaces, he or she pops up in your Space under the “Newly Updated Spaces” heading. Blogging is big on Windows Spaces. Members can leave messages or can chat using Messenger. You can also upload photos. Videos can be played using the Windows Media Player gadget which can be embedded in your Spaces page.



A default Spaces profile

Live Spaces has several settings for security and privacy. You can control access to your media depending on who the visitor is. These settings can be changed anytime. Your Spaces page may also be made public or private, only to be accessed by your friends. You can also access the information about visitors to your page, statistics like where are they coming from and how many people visited you during the last day or the last week. Windows Live Spaces reportedly censors the seven bad words (we can't print them either) but has attracted criticism for censoring words like democracy and freedom on its Chinese portal.

If you do most of your e-mailing using hotmail accounts, and if you have many friends who use Live Messenger, then Windows Live Spaces offers you an easy way to get started on social networking. But we found features here limited in comparison to other sites like MySpace and Bebo, against whom Live Spaces is positioned.



## 2.5 www.batchmates.com

Batchmates is an alumni database service which claims to be India's largest. It aims to separate long lost friends and colleagues from kindergartens, schools, colleges and offices who may have drifted apart from each other. Batchmates says that they have facilitated

more than 1500 meetings and about 1000 new people are joining everyday. These stats, apart from the Indian flavor of the site as well as the apparent usefulness inspired us to take it out for a test drive.

We came back impressed. The homepage has no bells or whistles, nor is it eye candy, but is efficient in conveying the intent of what the site was designed for. You get a list of all the states and Union Territories. The first thing to do is to select the state where your school or college is located. After selecting the state you get a list of cities and towns in that state arranged according to alphabetical order. To verify the reach which Batchmates claims to have, we selected Assam. We were forced to dump our cynical attitude when the site threw up places in Assam which even people who have lived there have not heard much about. Impressive!

And the great part of this is that all this can be done without registration, which is superb. Why register if you can't find your school later? Of course only members can add schools or colleges of their own. You can join more than one institution at the same time. In fact Batchmates aims to trace your whole journey from kindergarten to retirement.

Once you become a registered member you can do most of the things that you do when you meet old friends. Exchange messages, post photos, talk about first crushes and describe what you did

with your first paycheck. Invite friends. Get reminders for special dates. There are related categories like dating, gifts (Indian festivals like Rakhsha Bandhan, Rath Yatra have special gifts), e-cards etc. On the whole this site does its job without fuss.

## 2.6 www.yaari.com

These guys have hit upon a good name, if nothing else. An Indian social networking site, Yaari seems to have all the right ingredients for success. It has a great GUI, easy navigation, an innovative feature and the regulars. But predicting the success of a site is an extremely hazardous business and we would prefer to keep to the safer job of doling out bouquets and brickbats, thank you very much. Anyway here goes.



The colours on the site were what impressed us the most, apart from the now mandatory iPod offer. Cool greens set the tone for the rest of the surfing experience. During our first try at registration there were problems at the server, but it proceeded without any problems at our next attempt.

Exploring Yaari.com, we found that it had borrowed from the top dogs. The names about scraps and communities might be different but the basic idea is the same. In all fairness there were a few innovative ideas worth mentioning. Probably borrowing from the concept of mobile blogging and podcasting, Yaari enables users to post 'shout-outs' using your mobile phone. It is actually an SMS service, akin to the mobile phone alerts some e-mail ids offer. Mobile scrappers need to use a separate lingo comprising of Ywords. For those of you who can read and understand "2b or nt 2b", mobile blogging on Yaari is as easy as a fish going out for a swim. Users can

sent 10 free SMSs daily from Yaari after they have activated the service from the Web site, though this service is presently restricted to India only. You can upload pictures and embed music / video in your profile. Either paste code or attach a link to video hosting sites and the media will play inline. Rearranging the layout of the page and adding colours is also an option.

Your profile shows members, called Yaars grouped according to geographical proximity. For people who move about a lot this feature has its uses. Online Yaars are on your profile page and scrapping becomes instant messaging, albeit public. You can organise events and invite people, while



A profile on Yaari

getting together in groups. Entry works by invitation also, and the more people you invite to become members the more popular you become and your Popularity Score increases. Work hard on this, because it seems the folks at Yaari are holding a contest where the top 50 members in terms of Popularity Scores.

As a parting shot we could not resist a little crystal gazing, though we had promised to desist. Yaari has not attained high visibility in the crowded social networking scene because it has not discovered its USP, or has not made enough efforts to highlight one. Technically the site is high quality, but conceptually seems lacking.

## 2.7 www.minglebox.com

At a first glance Minglebox seems to be an Indian Facebook. In fact most of site is about campuses and students. This is a virtual goldmine as the campus and student population in India, like anywhere else in the world are the most enthusiastic users of social

networking, not to mention the Internet itself.

The homepage is quite deceptive, and the number of tabs and links hide the features Minglebox has to offer. Joining didn't require filling a boring form. For instance there was a field called Roots whose choices include "National Integration Product", "TamBrahmWham" "Delhi's in my Belly", among others. Go ahead and create an equally wacky option, if you are in a mood. By the time you finish editing your profile you will be wide awake, with a mile wide grin.



The campus area of Minglebox is where the real action is. Many colleges have their campus communities. Search for your campus, join the community, find old friends, upload videos and photos of anything related to your school/college or participate in polls and discussions. A member's application for joining a campus community is accepted only if s/he is verified by existing members. This provision imposes a semblance of order in an otherwise uncontrolled environment. Talk about hotspots, campus rumors and buzzwords. In case your institute does not have a presence, create one. Fresher's Q&A is a good place for freshers to know more about their college. In fact the Campus Intern program aims to create network of students from campuses who are enthusiastic about the Internet and blogging.



A campus page on Minglebox

Apart from the campus, this site has a lot of places to roam about. Music is big on this site and you can make a selection of tracks—Hindi, Pop, International and Regional to make your jukebox and listen to them while you continue surfing. Bloggers, as



A campus page on Minglebox

in most other places are welcomed here also and there is an inbuilt blog to unleash the power of your pen, or rather the keyboard. In fact so ubiquitous is this blogging feature on social networking sites that you have to spend all of your waking hours writing blogs if you want your visitors to see how into Web 2.0 you are. But we are digressing. People can make friends here, and there is a Yahoo messenger like IM module which enables you to do instant messaging. You can scrap a song from your jukebox via chat. A fun fact regarding this chat is that the most recent chats with your contacts can be made to appear scrambled in your profile. Your profile, apart from identifying you and serving as a place to hear music also keeps you updated on what is happening among your friends. The most popular videos, blogs and photo albums are featured there. If you like a profile or a blog, you can give it a kudo.

To get more members Minglebox allows you to import your address books from Orkut, Yahoo, MSN, Rediff and Google. This is potentially risky because people who get these invites might think they are spammed and would have a negative impression about the site.

## 2.8 www.ning.com

With a tagline “Create your own Social Network” Ning focuses more on the community part of social networking and less on individual friends. Joining Ning is meaningless if you don’t join a community inside. In fact Ning is what is referred to as mashups, a vast directory of networks, catering to every possible interest. There are more than 70,000, so you would be spoilt for choice. Some of the communities are open by invitation, while others are open to public. There is a basic template which can be modified by individual community owners to suit their design needs. Running on PHP and Java, the site was started in October 2005 by Marc Andreessen (the cofounder of Netscape and co author of Mosaic, the first graphical browser) and Gina Bianchini.



Ning’s service is free. Anyone can create a custom social network. Owners can get a copy of the source code of the basic template and tweak them using a variety of bells and whistles. The networks within Ning can add their own logos and visual design. Even e-mails and newsletters don’t have to be in the same boring format, they automatically assume the look



A community on Ning

and feel of the network. Networks can offer photo uploading facilities from sites like Flickr, and also from computers and mobile devices. Albums can be organised, photos tagged and Flash slideshows embedded. All these features come very handy for networks which are about photography. Networks created for video sharing have their own feature list to pick from. Video uploading can be done either directly or from sites that host videos, like YouTube. Here also Flash videos can be embedded. Most networks allow their members to change the look and feel of their profile pages. Ning has several themes of its own, and networks also typically create their own custom looks. They can put widgets on their profile pages. Members have a “chatterwall” where others can leave messages. They can also blog.

Friends can be added across networks. You don't have to belong to the same network as your friend. Security features like controlling e-mail notifications and blocking users are default, with more privacy settings coming up. You can do a search of networks based on tags. Address books from other sites can be imported.

Ning has both its advantages and disadvantages. Individuals with a single id can browse across thousands of networks. No more boring signups and remembering passwords for each site you have joined. For site creators Ning does the backend part of setting up networks like hosting and maintaining users accounts, leaving the creators to innovate on the network. On the flip side the owners of the networks don't have any say in advertising on their networks, nor do they have access to user data. To create really innovative layouts PHP programming knowledge is necessary, along with good CSS/HTML skills. That means the average Tom, Dick and Harry can create his own network, but it will not be much different from other sites.

## 2.9 [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)

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Meetup is an example of glocalisation where information technologies like the Internet are used to provide local services on a global scale. The basic idea of Meetup is to convert all those online friend-





who live nearby whenever a Meetup group is started, and also notifying members of groups about upcoming events. There is a *Organiser of the Week* award for meetups that gets the best feedback. Organisers have a wide support network of other experienced organisers to fall back upon. Each Meetup group has its own About page, which enumerates its aims and activities. About page design can be customised. Every week there is also a prize for the best designed About page. Memberships in groups are free or can be an amount that covers the costs of organizing the meetings, while some groups may have paid activities.

Meetup earns its revenue mainly through monthly subscriptions from Organisers, advertising and fees from organizations who use Meetup to grow their own networks. This charging from members for co-ordinating Meetups earned considerable criticism when it



A community on Ning

was introduced in April 2005 and also saw a drop in members and groups, but those that remained later on enabled Meetup to maintain a stable base and expand. Monthly subscription rates are in the region of \$12 to \$19 (depending on the plan) with a 30 day money back guarantee. An Organiser can simultaneously run 3 groups without paying additional fees, or can step down at any time. Meetup lists 29,690 groups and 3,517 topics with 60,792 meetups in June. People can also invite their friends to join Meetup.

The site had clean design and though some places looked cluttered, overall experience was good. Payments are made through PayPal and so they are secure. Registration took a few minutes and joining a group was only a click away, though Organisers have to spend time on creating a Meetup group.

When we checked the relevance of India we saw quite a lot of Meetup groups in cities and towns across the country. As with their global counterparts, Indian groups also had a wide variety of interests. During our random amblings we saw Meetup groups as varied as GMAT group in Mumbai to a herbalist group in Guntur. Though people in India still don't spend as much time on the Internet as people in the West do and many places have empty listings, this service might fulfill a basic need in the future.

The screenshot shows the Meetup website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Meetups by Topic', 'Meetups by City', 'Start a Meetup Group', and 'What's Meetup?'. Below this, there's a section titled 'Meetups by Topic' with three columns: 'Categories', 'Popular Topics', and 'Growing Topics'. The 'Categories' column lists various interests like Activities, Books, Culture & Community, Education, Film/TV, Events, Games, Health, and Hobbies. The 'Popular Topics' column lists topics like Activities, Books Clubs, Clubs, Conferences, Corporate & Business, Entrepreneur, Events, Film/TV, Food & Drink, Foreign Languages, Games, Health, Hobbies, and Jobs in Tech. The 'Growing Topics' column lists topics like ART, Music, Photography, Reading, and Travel.

Meet people based on interests

## 2.10 www.bebo.com

A close competitor of MySpace and Xanga, Bebo based its format on these social networking sites. Launched in January 2005 by Michael and Xochi Birch, Bebo is the third most popular social networking site and also the third fastest growing. It is most popular in Ireland.

The screenshot shows the Bebo website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Music', 'Video', 'Authors', 'Register', and 'Help'. Below this, there's a section titled 'People' with a grid of profile pictures. To the right of the profile pictures, there's a large advertisement for a forest fire prevention campaign. Below the 'People' section, there's a 'Music' section with a grid of album covers.

Profiles on Bebo contain the same sort of information which sites of these genre do. Some features which looked new was the Whiteboard widget—a sort of canvas which can be used to draw designs or write stuff by visitors who visit your profile. The Whiteboard works using ffArt, free flowing art with features to

add comments and captions. There is a neat Google map which shows the locations of your visitors. And there are plenty of widgets to add to your profile from categories like gossip, picture effects, slideshow, guestbook etc.

You can rearrange the modules on your profile page and also create and name your own widgets. Same goes with skins. There are plenty of themes and colours to choose from, as well as the option to make one. You can adjust privacy settings of your profile to prevent it from being publicly viewed. Add in videos and blog posts, photo albums, the whole works and your profile is ready. You can also paste a Bebo badge in other Web sites to show to others your status as a card carrying Beboist (no such word, we made that up!).

Bebo has a huge music section where there are areas for bands and musicians. In this sense it is like MySpace. Musicians can upload their music on Bebo if they have copyrights. But Bebo is different because many fans, music clubs also have a presence on this part of the site. You

can have a playlist here, as well as have a list of music titles which your friends like to hear. Video uploading is also provided and there are contests all the time where videos are judged by members and voted. Featured videos can be added by members to their



Music is extensive on Bebo



Widgets for your page

own profiles. Author section in Bebo also has authors posting excerpts from their books which are reviewed by the community and rated.

The search within Bebo allows you to search for friends inside. There are college / school networks where you can join as student or alumnus. A funny section drew our attention. “What are you doing?” the question went, and just write what you are doing now , what are you



Skins you can use

doing tonight or what you wished you were doing. The most popular quotes (we can't figure out how they did that) got prominent mention. You can mail people using a standard form, though the mail can have a selected skin as well. And people who have Skype IDs can chat with friends from inside Bebo. Friends can write stories for you, and you can put the image of your other half (boyfriend, girlfriend, buddy) and highlight it.

Our experiences with the site were mixed. We had a lot of trouble searching for profiles and stumbled only on a link purely by accident. All the customisation looked easy, but the end result was often not what the owners intended. Most of the profiles we browsed had atrocious designs as widgets were thoughtlessly added. It almost gave one the picture of a skinny donkey being burdened with heavy loads. Owing to the choice of skins, many profiles were not readable. And some members updated animations as their profile picture. Though it sounds cool, sometimes these animations are pretty distracting, especially in the Thumbnail view.

Of all the public profiles we viewed we saw a lot of profiles of teens under the age of 18. This conforms to the result of a survey

on two million pages which found one in three by children under 18. Some of them had posted suggestive pictures on their albums, which could be viewed by anybody. Bebo is also blamed by police in UK for being used by children to organise brawls and mess fights. In Northern Ireland there was a case where Bebo was used to organise a sectarian fight. Bebo must address these concerns, especially the problem of underage users if they want to provide a reasonably safe networking experience.

## 2.11 www.fropper.com

A new Indian dating site, Fropper is owned by the same company which owns Shaadi.com. But unlike its more popular cousin, Fropper is pretty much fringe, and fighting for eyeballs with the big fish in the social networking space. Its uniqueness could be its Indian roots, but then again there are a lot of India based social networking sites that do a better job at it.



Fropper has something called the Zone. This is actually the plain old profile with a fancy name. You get registered and do the by now familiar jig of updating your particulars and posting your pictures. They also have a option to arrange the



Fropper's premium membership payment plans

layout and colours on your page. Nothing big, just clicking on a few radio buttons.

Photos can be uploaded by any member. There is an upload limit, 20 Mb for a month. You can check out your friends' pictures too. Comment on photos and tag them for easy search. The video option is newly introduced and there are videos to choose and view from. But we could find

no information on things like whether videos could be uploaded by members and what, if any, are the upload options. Even the FAQ page was silent on the video feature. There is a ezBlog which, the site helpfully tells us demystifies blogging. We open the ezBlog tab from the dashboard and get to a page with weird spelling and grammar and spelling. They call Shakespeare Sheikspeare and have sentences that say "Even small kid can do". Ouch! Admittedly the blogosphere is filled with examples of such spelling and language, and perhaps the site adopted this lingo because they wanted to look cool and funny, but we feel it would have looked better if they had tried to be humorous and used a bit of word play without typing "write" as "rite" and asking "You not believe?". You can scrap your friends, and meet other people in groups.

Fropper has another area called Relationships which focuses on dating. Members have to use a separate log in name in this section. They can see online members and launch an internal chat application to chat with them. However you can chat only with a friend, not with any random person. But before chatting with a person you need to send them a Buzz. It is a small pre selected message which is used to know whether a person is interested in you. You can use only one Buzz per person, but you still have



ezBlogs going easy on the language?

unlimited Buzzes to go around. Fropper even allows you to get invited to real world events or to create new ones.

There is a concept of Premium members—members who have more privileges than the aam aadmi . These privileges include writing unlimited message and chatting with any member. As non premium members you can chat for free with premium members only. And the rates are pretty steep, from Rs 220 to Rs 330 depending on payment plan. For a harmless bit of chat that is too expensive, especially when you have places that allow you to do all this and more for free.

Fropper left us sorely disappointed. We had nothing to remember it by, and it won't surprise us if the site comes to a cropper.

## 2.12 www.bigadda.com

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Another of those Indian social networking sites Bigadda ostensibly borrows its name from adda which means a cosy gathering where people get together and talk on any topic under the sun. Apart from its friendly sounding, inviting name Bigadda had very little to offer and we came back disappointed.



Joining requires an invite, but you could request for one. This free invite takes time, and we wonder what prevented them from having a public signup, especially since they did not seem to target any niche groups and people have hundreds of networking sites to choose from. The interface was plain and simple with nothing we haven't seen already. The profile making part is the same

and there are no brain teasers. You get the same photo and video uploading tabs on your dashboard and.....by know you know the script well. And guess what? Bigadda too has blogs with all the usual bells and whistles. Blogs here are organised into categories, and they are searchable using keywords.

Bigadda seems to be using the same terms that other Indian networks are using. We have no comments on who used what first, because no body had applied for copyrights. And the user bases of these sites are also very low, with most sites typically in alpha or beta. The only new term,



Addas on Bigadda

not idea , that we saw in Bigadda was the Adda. Addas are where people hang out. Sounds like another desi name for communities and groups. And users can create their own addas. Did we say what scribbles are? Well they are just short messages from random folks who dropped in to say hi, or to leave a friend request. Scribbles though are not a very convenient way to carry a conversation forward. The format do not support it. Scribbles are also used by adda members to communicate.

As mentioned earlier, Bigadda is a new site and is in alpha. What struck us as curious was that most profiles were incomplete and there was very little activity. Activity might pick up as more and more features are added, or it might be forced to shut down. The navigation was fast and interfaces professionally done, though getting an invite for logging in remains a sore point.

As we surveyed the Indian social networking site, we noticed that most of them were clones of each other and also of the more successful experiments abroad. Strip them of those cute words



and the interfaces and they become the same. To remain in business in the notoriously fickle Internet market where attention spans are abysmal and customer loyalty almost a mirage, these sites have to reinvent themselves and adopt a model more suited for Indian populations.

# Media Sharing



**S**haring media files with family and friends is the new online fad. Thanks to high speed Internet and increasing broadband penetration, distributing printed photos, DV tapes or DVDs of your media to family is *passé*. All we need to do these days is upload to a media sharing site. What's more, with online tools such as [Phixr.com](#) and [Fauxto.com](#), you don't even need to have photo editing tools on your local system—everything can be done online. Let's take a look at some of the best online media sites out there.

## 3.1 www.youtube.com

YouTube is for anyone and everyone who has a video clip and considers it worth sharing with the world, family or a few friends. It is the most popular Internet television and video distribution site, with over 332 million video streamers and 70 per cent increase in market share of U.S. visits between January and May 2007.



**Better than TV!**

Founded in February 2005 by three former employees of PayPal—Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim, YouTube caught the fancies of every online user who had a video that he or she wanted others to see. YouTube became an online video Mecca where anyone with a camera could post first hand reports of current events, hobbies and share anything you consider to be a special moments caught on camera.

On YouTube, you will find comedy: “Americans are NOT stupid—WITH SUBTITLES” in the comedy category features a public talk show to show how ignorant Americans are. You can also “Learn to play the Pink Floyd Classic Wish You Were Here” under HowTo & DIY. Check out the latest cars from the Autos & Vehicles section, or learn “How to change gears in a car without using the clutch”.

Despite the mushrooming of similar sites, YouTube is still the most popular—Google purchasing this company is November 2006 is testimony to this.

## How Do I Share A Video?

Just sign up at YouTube.com, and after confirming your e-mail address, upload your videos. A single video cannot exceed 100 MB in size and shouldn't contain any objectionable and copyrighted content. Copyrighted content includes TV series or movies that are sold commercially. Even videos from concerts, TV commercials, slideshows and photos created and owned by someone else are not allowed. Copyright infringement could lead to removal of your YouTube account, or you getting sued by the copyright holder. The best way to avoid copyright infringement is to create your own short movies.

After you upload a video, it is converted into the Adobe Flash format, so that it can be played in most browsers, instead of requiring a standalone player. This is the time you can choose whether you want the video to be public, private or shared with up to 25 users of your choice.

Even if you don't have any videos to upload, you can become a member and get the latest videos in the categories you like delivered to your mailbox and view videos that require a membership.

With millions of people viewing videos a day, there's a good chance that your video might become popular. If you're a budding video artist, this could be the platform that sets you on your path to stardom. The maximum video length is restricted to 10 minutes, however, so you can forget about making feature length blockbusters.

You also need to remember that the video resolutions are downsized to fit the site, and Flash compression is also lossy, so your video might not look as good as it was when you shot it. If you're shooting with a camera phone or your digital camera, however, this shouldn't matter.

You can even link video clips to your blog or Web site, thus subjecting an even larger audience to your creativity.

While watching videos, buffering is sometimes slow, depending on your connection speed, and this causes videos to pause and play irregularly. An easy way to avoid this is to let the video start playing, when it stops (while buffering) click on the Pause button. The video will now download in the background, indicated by a dark red progress bar, and once it's done you can watch your video without annoying breaks.

Though you cannot (legally) download videos from YouTube onto your system, you can still access the video from your system from `C:\Documents and Settings\User Name\Local Settings\Temporary Internet Files\` if you use IE or `"C:\Documents and Settings\User Name\Application Data\Opera\Opera\profile\cache4\` if you use Opera. Here, *User Name* is your PC login name.

There are many categories of videos to choose from, including Autos & Vehicles, Comedy, Entertainment, Film & Animation, Gadgets & Games, Howto & DIY, Music, News & Politics, People & Blogs, Pets & Animals, Sports, Travel & Places, etc.

Channels on YouTube are classifications of videos based on who uploaded them: for e.g. Directors, Musicians, Comedians, Sponsors, etc. Using Categories and Channels you can find the videos you like easily. Thanks to tagging, keyword searches in YouTube are very accurate.

You can comment and rate videos as well once logged in, as is expected in community sites. Be nice though, because once you have commented, only the video uploader can edit or delete comments.

You can respond to a video with your own video—your choices are to record a video (via Webcam), choose a video (from the lists of video you have already prerecorded or uploaded) or upload a new video.

Though most videos on YouTube are user generated, it has partnered with many big content providers such as CBS, BBC,

Universal Music, Sony Music, the NBA, etc., to provide some spectacular video clips and professional content.

## 3.2 www.flickr.com

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Using online photo sharing you can instantly share a photo with anyone, anywhere. When it comes to online photo sharing, nothing beats Flickr. Here you will find personal photographs, people and places, pets, artwork and more.



**Flickr—the best replacement for the family photo album**

Flickr has an interesting history to talk about. Ludicorp, the company behind Flickr, didn't start Flickr with the sense of public photo sharing. Ludicorp was an online game startup company and had created a tool to share photos and save them on a Web page while playing. It turned out that it was more fun sharing photos than playing games, and soon the project was transformed to create Flickr. The game never saw the light of the day and Flickr was launched in February 2004. Earlier, Flickr had chat rooms called FlickrLive with real-time photo exchange features.

In March 2005, Yahoo! took over Flickr, and the sites has seen a robust increase in user traffic ever since. It became the sixth fastest growing Web brand—growing at 201 percent with 6.3 million unique visitors in July 2006 (Nielsen/NetRatings).

### Quick Tour

You can login to Flickr with an existing Yahoo! ID, or just sign up for one. Once logged in, you can upload images of up to 5MB in size (default account). A free (default) account allows you to upload any number of images with a bandwidth cap (Upload) of 100 MB per month. Images greater than a resolution of 1024 pixels are resized to a 1024 pixel version.

Once you are a member, you can post comments, join groups and organise images, create contacts and blog. Flickr also allows its members to tag images so that they are easily searchable. Paid members have no bandwidth cap and can upload images of any size. They also see no advertisements and can create unlimited number of sets (groups).

Privacy of images is given great importance in Flickr. You can set your photos to be visible only to your friends or family. Even if you want only your friends, and not your family, to see certain images, you can do so by changing the privacy level appropriately. You can also restrict commenting and prevent the changing of tags.

Organizr allows you do all the above mentioned privacy changes along with editing of tags, names, creating or editing of sets and changing the location of image on the world map where the image was taken.

'Maps' allows you to map your photos to the location where the photo was taken. Mapping a photo to a location on the map is easy. You can zoom in on a map, satellite image or a hybrid view of a map and satellite image and then drag and drop your photos to the location where they were clicked.



Tell the world where your photos were taken

Uploading images is a breeze. There are multiple options to choose from—upload from Flickr's own Web site, e-mail to your own Flickr e-mail ID, through uploading tools, through add-ons in your browser and directly from browsers like Flock.

You can choose to e-mail photos to your Flickr account, or even directly from a mobile device.

You can download and install the Flickr Uploadr and let it sit in your system tray. Just drag and drop an image onto the Flickr icon to upload it. Perhaps the best part of this is that you can drag and drop multiple images to upload them all simultaneously. You can upload large images for archival purposes, but you will only be able to download them again if you have a paid account.

If Firefox is your choice of browser, you can find an add-on for it that will let you upload images to Flickr at <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/search?q=Flickr&status=Array>

Flickr allows you to share your pictures with groups, but you have to be a member of that group to contribute. A free Flickr account limits you to a maximum of 10 such groups.

You can form private groups within your contacts, or two types of public groups: those that anyone can join or the invitation only kind. Public groups are listed on the site, while private groups, obviously, aren't. Members within the group can edit the name, tag photos, write comments and post notes.

The Flickr search is good, but depends on user tags, so you will find irrelevant pictures in your searches if they are tagged wrongly.

Overall Flickr is a wonderful photo sharing site that has loads of features and is very user friendly.

### 3.3 [www.panoramio.com](http://www.panoramio.com)

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When was it you last saw a scenic photo and wondered where it was taken? Well, we all have wondered at one time or other and never quite got where the photo was taken. The photo sharing site Panoramio seems to address this problem. Like any other photo sharing site this one allows the users to upload images and share them. But then this site is for those who want to share photos of their surrounding and not themselves.



What keeps Panoramio out of the crowd is that this is a location aware photo sharing site. This means that the photos here have references to the location on Google map. Since Panoramio is all about photos of places if you upload images of pets, car and yourself they do not get associated to Google map. This is because images of objects and people don't tell anything about the place. Despite rejections Panoramio boasts more than a million photos and 3,00,000 registered users.



Panoramio is a more elaborate than of Flickr Maps

To upload photos you need to signup. The size of an image can be of maximum of 5MB and mapping of the photo needs to be done to the location and not over the subject of the photo. We took some images of locations from Goa and uploaded them. Once photo was uploaded we were prompted to type the title of the image. Now you can exit at this point without mapping the photo to the map or click on the link 'Map this photo'. Clicking on 'Map this photo' another text box pops up asking for the name of the place or city. If there is more than only place with the same name then Panoramio show which country these places are located in. We were astonished to see that there were 16 places in different countries called "Goa". Selecting the India we proceeded. A small window containing the satellite images and maps from the Google Earth showed us the location of Goa. You can now zoom into this satellite image and pinpoint the location of the picture with the help of a red balloon. We felt at this point that the satellite image could have been bigger to help us locate the place easily. Location based photos helps you to have a glimpse of the surroundings before keeping a foot at that place. After placing the images at a location in Goa we saw some other photos around that place making us realize that we hadn't visited them. At Panoramio you can

find photos of beaches, buildings, hills, and photos of one's surroundings. There are no paid services as of now and you can upload up to 2 GB of photos. The uploaded photos are not updated in real time on Google map and takes couple of weeks to see them on Google Earth, provide they satisfy certain conditions like—photo is of a place, images are not small in size and is ideally more than 4 megapixel, images are not blurred and they do not contain obstructive copyright notices.



Find your photos on Google Maps and Earth

Once our image was uploaded the image was represented as a blue compass on Google Earth and they are show up in every computer with Google Earth. If you find a wrongly located photo on the map posted by someone else and you know the correct location then you can use the link 'Suggest new location'. Once the owner finds that the location of his photo needs correction he may change the location to the suggested location. However, if you have placed the image wrongly on the map and want to correct it you can do so by clicking 'change position' button located under the two maps and drag the read bubble to correct location.

Unlike in Flickr we found that one could download the original file (image) and not worry about resolution being downgraded, a plus point in Panoramio. Tagging like in Flickr allows easy organization of uploaded photos. 'Favorites' represented (symbolized) as stars allows you to track new photos uploaded by that user.

Though the site has well balanced features we felt it lacks prettiness which is necessary for a Web site. No complaints in terms

of functionality wise. We however wished Panoramio could allow us to post photos of ourselves in a different layer on Google Earth.

Having said that, Panoramio is the only site that shares location awareness photos and with Google's takeover in June this year the services of site is bound to expand and become better.

### 3.4 www.fotothing.com

The name conveys it all—Fototing.com is a Web site for sharing photos online and features blog and commenting. The main objective of Fototing is to share photos with the original resolution with family and friends and keep a daily record of his life in photographic format for free. This site has 1,36,493 members and 15,62,099 photos. Fototing.com has a simple concept—upload up to 5 photos a day with captions of up to 10,000 characters long. Each photo can have 40 comments and the maximum size of the image being 44MB!

What we felt the best about Fototing.com is that when you upload your photos on its Web site it also reads the advance information from the photograph like camera manufacturer, camera model, aperture, shutter speed, if flash turned on/off and the date and time when the image was taken.

Here we again uploaded a photo of Goa and once uploaded a link to technical specifications was available. For a photo enthusiast information such as these are important to improve on his photographic



Create your own photo blog

skills and to see how others fared in similar conditions and what challenging photographs are framed at. This information is also useful to make friends who have the same camera such as yours. Technical details also allow people who want to upgrade their camera and potential camera buyers to judge camera based on image quality and make right purchase decisions. Another feature that we liked in the technical specification is that a link is created on the camera model of the photo. Like in our case the photos were taken in Canon Powershot A700 and clicking on the model (under technical specifications) we were taken to other photos that were taken with the same camera. A nice feature indeed.

Like in other photo sharing sites in fotothing.com you can interact with photos by marking photos as favorites and commenting on the photos. You can also add other members as friends and e-mail them.

Another feature that we liked here at Fotothing and was missed out in other photo sharing sites is that here you can choose to browse only through newly added photos or see which photo was recently added as favorites by other members . Features such as these allows easy lookup of what other members are uploading and understand what type of photos other members like. You can also choose to browse only through recently commented photo or understand what makes great photo by browsing through photos of the month.

We found a category called 'Community' had forums where one can talk about various topics related to photography. Topics here include, 'Which camera to buy?', 'Photography tips and tricks', 'Discussion on printers and printing services', 'Showing off best work' etc. Such discussions are useful and helpful for a novice and experts of photography. Under section 'community' you can see recently joined members or checkout the member listings like in phone directory. We found that you can also checkout who is online through the link 'Who is online' from this communality section. A good feature to see who is online and chat with them. We wondered why other sharing sites didn't think of it.

If you are board browsing through random photos then check photos based on camera brand and camera model which also will tell the most popular camera in fotothing.com. Well! Our camera was not quite popular as we thought it is! Sigh! On the second though our camera might be new and hence less not quite popular.

Fotothing also has in-depth articles on shooting subject in action, working with light, creating ultra sharp images, choosing photo hardware including image stabilizer lenses, making hides, mastering fill flash, choosing the right aperture under 'Photography Tips' which sure is an interesting read for all photo enthusiasts.

Paid members at Fotothing removes the 5 photo upload limit per day and will appear at the top of member directory and online list.

Fotothing.com doesn't look jazzy or appealing to casual surfers and they should work on making the site pretty. But otherwise this site has all the functional requisites a photo enthusiast would look for in a photo sharing site.

### 3.5 [www.yuntaa.com](http://www.yuntaa.com)

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The goal of this site is community sharing of photos, documents, video files and audio files. Unlike other media sharing sites that we have looked at so far, Yuntaa allows sharing of all media types under one roof.

Yuntaa was founded in October 2005 in Brussels, Belgium mainly focuses on the European community. You will not notice this, of course, until you try and pay for something and see that only Euros are accepted.

Yuntaa lets you store whatever you want online—like backing up your system. A free account entitles you to 1 GB of data storage, and by default, anything you upload is marked private—no one but you has access to this data. Security doesn't seem to be a

problem, because the site claims to have similar security measures as the US government.

Community sharing is possible if you set some of your files to be viewable by the public. Conditions apply, of course, and copyrighted and commercial music or

movies cannot be shared, but you can keep your collection private. Once files are shared publicly, they are subjected to Yuntaa filters that check for inappropriate material. Pornography, sexually explicit content, information involving illegal acts such as making of explosives, violence, acts of death, images of hatred against certain community / race / colour are all deleted.

We loved Yuntaa for its cool looks and good interface with animated icons representing the contents of a folder. You will see folders like My Files (similar to My Documents in Windows), My Audio, My Photos,

etc., which we found useful for proper segregation and organisation of data. We uploaded a couple of music and video files, and were able to play them back directly from the browser itself without the need to download them.



Yuntaa offers an alternative way to share media files over the Net



Yuntaa features a very friendly user interface

Yuntaa takes a bit of getting used to, and we found that certain icons need to be double-clicked—not something we’re used to doing on Web pages. Viewing pictures as a slideshow will keep your hands free for other things. You cannot play your uploaded music and watch a slideshow at the same time, but then maybe we’re asking for too much.

You can share specific files or entire folders with individuals. All you have to do is select a file, click Share and then enter the e-mail address of the person you want to share the file with. The site is in Beta stage, so we hope that the few kinks we found will be ironed out soon. Overall, a very good site for backing up data and sharing pictures securely with close friends.

### 3.6 www.dailymotion.com

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Dailymotion is a wonderful site if you want to share videos from your digital camera, mobile phone or just a video lying on your hard drive. The aim of this site is allow sharing of video just like in **Y o u T u b e**. Dailymotion had around 9 thousand videos posted daily with page views in excess of 16 million as of November 2006. It is the 48 most-trafficked site in the world according to Alexa as on June 18, 2007.



Dailymotion's video quality is much better than YouTube's

Dailymotion has a few distinct advantages over YouTube. For

starters, a video file can be up to 150 MB in size, and duration can be 20 minutes. Video resolution can be 640x480—double of what YouTube offers.

After you become a member, you can upload videos and join groups with similar interests. There seem to be many more groups here than at YouTube. Once you have joined a group, you can upload video and receive comments from that group. Uploaded videos can only be moderated by the owner of that group.



Uploading videos is very easy

You can subscribe to ‘channels’, so whenever another member of that channel uploads a new video, it appears on your My Space page.

‘My Space’ is like your personal Web page in Dailymotion. We liked this feature because it contains quick links to many sections of Dailymotion and links to videos that you like. This page also contains your user profile along with information such as number of views of uploaded videos, the number of subscribers subscribed to your videos and the number of users who have added you as their favorites.

Other than quick access to different channels, the home page contains list of users whose Web pages (profiles) in Dailymotion are creatively the best. If you’re looking for a YouTube alternative, DailyMotion is it.



## 3.7 www.blogTV.com

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BlogTV is place where you can show off your talent through live webcam broadcast. Musicians can use BlogTV to play live shows, wannabe actors can take their shots, and chefs can bake for their audiences. But before you jump in, make sure you have at least a 256 Kbps connection.

BlogTV is an Israel-based company that enables anyone with a webcam to broadcast live episodes that are viewable across the world. Other than live broadcasting a member can record and archive his shows which are automatically stored in the members 'Show Page'. This recorded video can then be embedded into other sites and blogs. Chatting with viewers is possible through BlogTV and also you can have live feedback during the show.

BlogTV has another unique feature where in two broadcasters together can co-host the show. To go about hosting the show you need to have a Pentium 4 PC or an Apple Mac, the latest Flash player installed and 128 MB



Create your own TV series

of RAM, Firefox or Internet explorer 6 and above.

Before you start broadcasting you need to understand the effects of lighting as images from webcams usually tend to be unviewable in bad lighting. BlogTV has tip and tricks to address this issue at <http://www.blogtv.com/tips>

There are two types of shows you can host at BlogTV: a Live Show and a Recorded show. Just log in to your account and click

“Start Broadcasting Now” to start a live show, and if you like, click Record to save the show on BlogTV. Before recording, you need to select which channel (category) you are going to place the show in, because once it is saved you cannot modify this selection.

On [blogtv.com](http://blogtv.com) you cannot broadcast shows that are racist, threatening or insulting in any way. Your privacy as a member is protected by not disclosing your e-mail address unless you explicitly want to share it.

Overall, [blogtv.com](http://blogtv.com) is a site with innovative media sharing concept with good features thrown in. But at some point when navigating through pages you would feel that the Web site could have been designed in a better way so as to grab the attention of a casual surfer.

### 3.8 [www.Cylive.com](http://www.Cylive.com)

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Cylive is one stop for all types of media sharing. Be it photos, video or music you can share it all with friends and family. Cylive (pronounced ‘sy-liv’) call themselves the “home of your digital stuff” and when you read through further you will know why they call themselves that.

The name Cylive is made by joining cyber and living. And it sure is cyber living, with about 2,50,000 unique users. So why are so many people flocking to Cylive? To start with, Cylive lets you store and share; produce and publish *any* content in a social, collaborative context. This means that Cylive can be used to manage, create, store, share, distribute and publish data that may be tagged or just lying around on the Web, all under one roof. You can collaborate with your friends and family to jointly produce and publish content.

Cylive allows personalisation of the content you publish. For example, audio clips can be attached to uploaded photos, and the

audio track can narrate the story behind the pictures, or just be background music. Better still, you can upload a music video and then attach the sheet music and lyrics.

Cylive also provides “access-rights-based” functionality for sharing of media with family and friends. For example you can allow everyone in your family to update your photo album, but restrict your friends to viewing only. This feature allows you to be in control of who can do what with your content.



### Living Cyber with Cylive

Cylive has another unique feature. It also allows you to discover related content regardless of the media type. For example let's say you do a search for Aishwarya Rai: apart from showing you pictures of her, Cylive will also show you a video clip of her wedding, an interview with her in the form of a podcast, the names of movies she's acted in, etc.—provided this content has been uploaded by other Cylive members.

As soon as you login, you will notice that there are different templates for different activities. There are templates for videos, photosets, audio, file folders, movie reviews and many more. If you select, say, a photoset, you will be presented with two options—either import images from Flickr or create a new album. If you create a new album, you will find a drop down menu asking you which category to place this album into. After adding a title, tags and a description you are taken to another page where you select your picture, add captions, set permissions, etc. This type of step by step procedure allows even a newbie to start sharing with ease.

A tabbed panel with divisions and categories under each, neatly laidout, this site is sure to be a big hit even for media sharing beginners. The basic account with Cylive is free, and it is a won-

derful site for all types of media sharing. Make sure you try the readymade templates to make your life easier.

### 3.9 www.twango.com

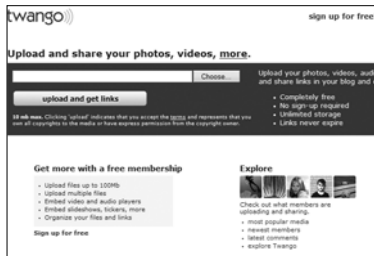
Twango is a media sharing site for anyone who doesn't even want to take the effort of signing up, but still wants to share media files. In one easy step you can share photos, videos and audio with friends, family or the whole world. You don't even have to be a member to view the shared media content.

Twango founded by a few previous managers of Microsoft officially launched the site on October 11, 2006. The main concept behind this site creation was media sharing without one needing to go through the signup process and also enabling a non member to view the shared file.

Members of Twango get a few advantages over non-members, such as a 100 MB file upload, multiple file uploads, organising files and getting links.

Media can be uploaded in many ways here, just as in Flickr. You can upload files from Twango's Web site, use ActiveX controller on the Web site to drag and drop images and Via e-mail which is useful to upload photos from a camera phone.

If at any point you don't want tom, dick and harry to upload files or photos to your channel via e-mail, you can use 'secret-word' to prevent them from uploading anything. For example Digit has a channel on technology and you can upload photos by e-mailing digit.technology.test@twango.com. Then the owner of



Share media without signing up!

this account can change the default address by selecting account tab from 'edit profile' and change path of e-mail address such as digit.technology. **test10@twango.com** and prevent others from uploading.

Twango has many other features that makes it stand out from the rest. For example, there is support for photos, video and files of various formats. There is no sign-in required to contribute to your private or public channel. Upload media, share and notify your recipients all with one step, and all directly from e-mail.

Since each channels has unique e-mail address one can upload files to only that particular channel from various devices like mobile, PDA and even from computers where Twango is blocked from accessing.

In Twango you can add multiple moderators to control your channel which is helpful when you don't have time to moderate and want to allow others to moderate your channel. Twango in future would be having API (Application Programming Interface) that would allow a programmer to develop third party software tools such as uploaders, visualisations for Twango relationships, etc. Such API just tells us that many useful tools may be on the way.

Twango does not charge for the basic account and they don't have a paid service as well. With this basic account one can load any number of files with unlimited storage and 250MB per month upload bandwidth. The maximum file size of a single file is 100 MB.

### 3.10 **ishare.rediff.com**

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iShare from Rediff is the only Indian media sharing portal where users can share video, music and picture. iShare aims to collaborate rich social multimedia content from online community under one single roof. Rediff through iShare aims to provide a platform for Indian youth to showcase their talent on Internet

along with professional content for those who want to reach out to new audience.

iShare was recently launched on July 10, 2007, so there's no history to speak of. Browsing through the site we felt the navigation was easy and straightforward. It has five tabs: Video, Audio, Music, Home and My Home. On the home page you will find featured media.

My Home is your personal Web page on iShare and contains list of uploaded files, your favorites and scrapbook where you can jot down a few points. You cannot look into another person's scraps, so privacy is maintained.



**iShare is India's only (somewhat clean) media sharing site**

Like Orkut, iShare has a column for recently visited users to your home page. Videos and photos in iShare are decently laidout with only 12 thumbnails on each page. Move your mouse over them for more information like name, user who uploaded it, tags the file is associated with, categories it belongs to and votes that video/image received. We felt that this kind of information popup made the page look uncluttered, organised and not cramped with information.

Tags on each media gave a list of popular contents of that media on iShare. Categories here provided us an insight into the categories one can browse through in that media.

The interface of the player in Video and Audio sections looked quite similar to Window Media Player; easy to navigate for persons who are comfortable with WMP. The music section contains list of songs that were recently added in iShare along with the duration of each music.

We didn't notice any buffering while playing music and video which is a plus point. But then, the quality of the video was not too good either. If there's quick movement in the video, pixellation is obvious.

Photos are also compressed to fit the frame. Video, images and music can be uploaded only by using the iShare upload tool, and not via the site, which is a shortcoming. You can upload an unlimited amount of videos and music, so long as file sizes are smaller than 50 MB and 10 MB respectively.

Tagging, editing and deleting files can also only be done via the iShare tool. Since this is still a new site, there aren't many videos and photos, but we expect that to change soon. There is no mention of what can and cannot be uploaded, but we're presuming copyrighted content is not allowed. Overall, it's a site to watch out for.

# Hobbies, Tastes And Special Interests



**E**veryone loves to find people who share their interests. They connect with each other over their tastes in music, or even arcane things like their favourite colour palettes. There may be some weird people out there, but there's nothing stopping them from meeting each other.



## 4.1 Photo Sharing—Zoomr.com

Unlike Flickr and most other photo sharing sites, Zoomr is primarily targeted at the photography enthusiast. It has a refreshing, clean interface with an emphasis on minimizing the clutter. It is also free, with no file size limit, no upload or download bandwidth restriction, no photo limits, and no photoset limits. Also note the three Os in the URL—Zoomr as opposed to Zoomr. If you mistakenly type in Zoomr.com, it will take you to a MFA (made for advertising clicks) site. Zoomr has just relaunched with what it calls the Mark III interface so things are still in beta and everything may not work perfectly. Even with these minor glitches Zoomr is a great site and as comfortable as an old shoe!



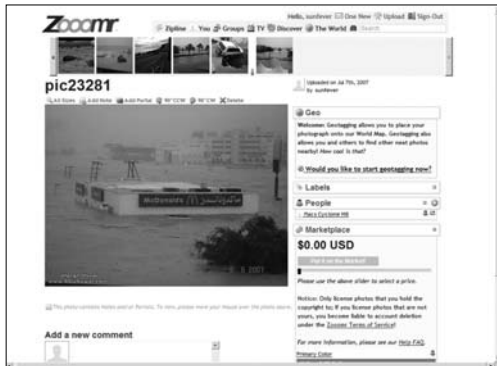
**Zoomr—Uploading is a snap. Multi select files and watch the progress**

Signing up is fairly straightforward. Enter your choice of username, password and you will get an e-mail confirmation asking you to confirm. Alternately you can use your OpenID login to enter Zoomr. OpenID is an upcoming Web identity system that allows you to enter a single username and password in all participating sites. Go over to <http://myopenid.com> to register your ID. You can then use that one ID to sign-in at all participating sites.

If you don't want to see the ads, you can upgrade to a paid Pro account for \$19.95 (Rs 800) per year which not only makes your account ad-free but also will provide you with some interesting tools and analytics for managing your photo stream.

Uploading is quite simple with the mass bulk uploader page. Simply click on the browse button, multi-select the images you

want to upload (hold down the [Ctrl] key and click on each file that you want uploaded). Hit the upload button and the page will show the progress meter for each file being uploaded. This visual feedback is great as you will



**Zoomr is flexible and versatile for both amateurs and professionals**

know the progress of each individual file and help you quickly identify the files remaining for upload should the connection break for some reason.

There are some cool tools on each picture page. The All Sizes magnifying glass allows you to select different sizes of the picture, which you can download or use the URL to embed in your blog, or e-mail and share with your friends. You can select an area on the picture and add a note to it, add a portal—a clickable area which will open another picture, and rotate the picture clockwise or counter-clockwise 90 degrees. You can also GeoTag the picture using Google Maps, add labels, select an area of the picture with a person's face and specify the name of the name person and e-mail address, or his / her Zoomr user id. Last but not least, if you are into professional photography, you can put up your original creations on the marketplace. Set a price for the image and offer it for download to your clients. Way Cool!

## 4.2 Collaborative Wiki—WetPaint.com

If you want to do any kind of collaborative writing project with a group of people—friends, family, or even just strangers who share your interests, then WetPaint is one site that you must definitely look at.

A wiki at its simplest is a Web application that allow many people to add and edit content—similar to Wikipedia. However, while Wikipedia is solely focused on encyclopedic information, WetPaint's mission is different. It wants to allow users to

start a collaborative writing project on any project that they fancy. There are tons of WetPaint wikis already up and running and you may want to take a look see at the existing wikis before choosing to start your own. For example a simple search for Harry Potter on WetPaint threw up 859 results. Likewise, there will be thousands of WetPaint sites already created on various topics. Search and browse around and look at the different wikis already up and running before making the decision to start your own. In general the choice between joining some other collaborative project, or starting your own wiki, will depend on what exactly your objectives are. If say you want to have a Wiki group just for the magical weapons and implements used in the Harry Potter novels then maybe you may need to create a separate wiki if there are none on the subject.

The disadvantage with starting your wiki, espe-



Participate in or start a wiki on your favourite subject



Setting up WetPaint—Step 1

cially if it's on a popular topic with lots of sites devoted to the topic, you may not be able to attract enough wiki collaborators and your wiki may eventually die (you might also will lose interest in it). The advantage with starting your own wiki is that you will, to some extent, have a greater control on the site layout and design as well in the content which goes up on the site. You can control who has permissions to edit your wiki and who doesn't. You may either choose it to be open to public edit or by invite only members. The choice will be entirely yours. WetPaint promises that it removes all the technical stuff and makes it easy for a lay user to get up and running with the Wiki. They aren't lying. Starting your wiki is a simple three step process.

In step 1 you give a name to your wiki, type in a unique Web address for it, choose a category, select who can edit it and go to step 2 where you choose the color and style layout. Once you've made the selection you move on to step 3 where you sign up and invite friends to join up. WebPaint can connect to your AOL, Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail, and Outlook / Outlook Express contact list, making it easier to choose the friends you want to invite. You can also specify whether the invitees will have Administrator (most powerful) status or lesser roles like Moderator, Writer and Registered User. Once the invitations are sent, your wiki will be created and you are ready to rumble!

WetPaint will guide you through the process of getting your wiki up and running and will give you useful hints and sugges-



The Wiki is ready to rock



Self help orientation tutorial

tions. There is also a very useful orientation tool that will show you the progress of your learning on how to use WetPaint. Once you've got a hang of it, the imagination is your limit.

### 4.3 Social Action—india.takingitglobal.org

For those of you who have felt strongly about any issue and felt frustrated at your inability to take positive action, TakingITGlobal is the place for you. TakingITGlobal's stated mission is to provide a forum for young people to congregate, build artistic and media expression, make education more engaging, and get involved in global decision making. The site partners with global organisations like UN agencies, major companies, and youth organisations to facilitate the involvement of youth in a wide range of activities.



TakingITGlobal—India home page

With more than one hundred thousand members from nearly all the countries on the planet, TakingITGlobal (TIG) has a strong youth and activity focus that maybe just what you are looking for. Each country has its own Web site and the Indian site has more than 7000 members already.

As with most other social networking sites, signing up is relatively painless. As a final step during the signup process, you can import your contacts from your favorite e-mail account and invite them to join the TIG network as well. You can create your own blog, participate in online discussions, join groups with similar interests or just browse the member profiles to make connections with others with similar interests. There is also a section on mem-

ber stories which showcases inspirational stories and messages from members from round the globe. In addition there are some cool tools like a live map that shows TIG users online at the present moment and integration with standard social networking sites like My Space, LinkedIn, Orkut etc . It can even pull your blog feeds from your regular blog site making it easy to publish to your main blog and have the same content appear automatically in your TIG profile as well.

TIG is designed to be a source of inspiration and positive influence to youth who are interested in making a positive contribution to the planet and to society. The 'Take Action' section details how you can get started on taking action on any issue that's burning a hole in your mind. A PDF



A real time update on the world wide location of TIG users currently online

download gives you an overview of how to go about organising your action plan, the TIG network provides a ready avenue for you to recruit supporters for your plan and it gives you all the tools and know how needed to organise your event. You can organise Projects and Groups and you have a ready Workshop kit that will help you in setting up your project meeting and brainstorming sessions. The Voice section will give you an insight into global decision making processes and help you identify local, national and international processes and also that of the United Nations. There are resource and tools and an event calendar which will list the upcoming events in which you can participate.

And this is just once section of TIG. In the 'Browse Resources' section you can find additional information on organisations in many different categories, you can also search for professional

and financial opportunities that aligns with your interest and discover avenues to finance yourself doing the thing that you feel most passionately about. On top of this there are tool kits and publication on a variety of topics that will help you get up to speed on the subject.

Many of us feel strongly about doing something but are confused about what to do. The ‘Understanding Issues’ section is a good starting point to plug into the current major global issues that are hot on the TIG network. There are Featured Themes, Educational Games, sections on Cultural Diversity, Social Justice, and much more. The amount of information that’s available can be a bit overwhelming, but don’t get fazed out. Just follow your instincts and you will be on your way.

## 4.4 Book Lovers—shelfari.com

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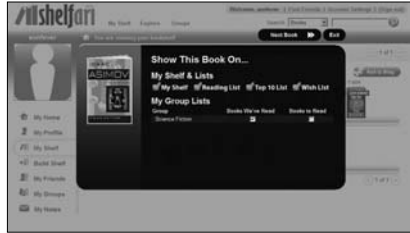
Shelfari provides an online watering hole for book lovers to congregate and spend time together. For book lovers this will be particularly appealing as there are powerful collaborative features that can help you quickly organise your library and interact with others with a similar passion. To start you go through the simple sign up process, then pop over to the build shelf section and start adding your books.

Adding books is easy. Click on ‘Build Shelf’ and search for the books you want to add. You can search for the book by its title, author, subject or ISBN number. In almost all cases multiple editions of the same book will be listed and you need to only choose the edition you have. If you have a lot of books and you are comfortable with creat-



Connect with book lovers from around the world who love the same books as you

ing tab-delimited text files you can download the sample text files and use the format to fill in your list. You can then simply upload it to fill your book shelf in one step rather than try to add it to the



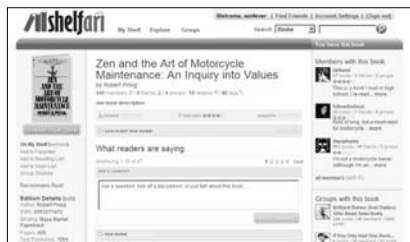
Manage your book collection

shelf one by one. If you have a lot of books to be added to the book shelf consider this option. Once you've added your books you can view them on your bookshelf in the 'My Shelf' section. From here you can do many things. There is a Top 10 List, a Reading List, and a Wish List. Click on any of the books in the shelf or find them via searching and click on the + sign. This will open up the book in a "Show this Book on" window as shown in the figure below.

This window enables you add the book to your three lists and also will show you if it belongs in any of your groups. Groups are, well, groups of Shelfari members who have gotten together based on a topic, subject, genre or any other common interest.

The Explore option allows you to view all the books on the Shelfari shelves from many perspectives. You may want to look at the top Shelfarians by number of books, the number of tags they apply to their books, those who are most active with their comments, or who write the most opinions. You may want to explore the books looking at the most talked about books or the ones with the maximum opinions, and also see recent comments on the books.

Exploring groups can help you get started in finding communities with interests similar to yours. You can either search by keywords or browse to find what you are looking for.



It can be addictive!



Once you come upon a group that you like, simply click on the “Join this group” button. Participating in groups is an easy and powerful way to get more out of your area of interest. Comments and opinions from members of the group will help you understand and give you greater insight into the subject and pique your interest in exploring the other books on the group’s shelf.

Clicking on any book will show you the number of members and other interesting details which can keep you engrossed far longer than you intend if you are not careful!

## 4.5 Music Sharing—Ezmo.com

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Ezmo is a music sharing site that enables you to share your music with up to 10 friends. In a certain sense you could consider it as a shared media library between 10 friends. To start you sign up and then upload music to your Ezmo account. The concept is that each person will upload their personal collection of music and playlists into Ezmo. This can then be shared between all the friends in your group and can be played using the embedded Ezmo Player. The service is completely legal and there are no limits on storage, upload bandwidth, listening bandwidth or file size. You can upload your entire music collection and listen to it using the Ezmo player from any computer on the net.

To upload music you download and install the Ezmo Music Uploader which can automatically upload music from your iTunes, Windows Media Player and / or Winamp Library, or you can specify a directory which contains the songs you wish to upload. If you do not want to install the Ezmo Uploader application you can also use their Manual upload page where you add the songs manually from your hard disk.

It might take a while after the files are uploaded before it becomes available in your Ezmo player but once it is available there you can then play it from any computer by simply signing

into Ezmo.com. To play the uploaded songs simply open the player and playlist page and double-click on the song you want to hear. The player is simple and straightforward and it removes the requirement for you to have a media player installed on your computer before you can listen to your collection of songs. You can pause and restart the song at any time you like.



Upload your music to Ezmo

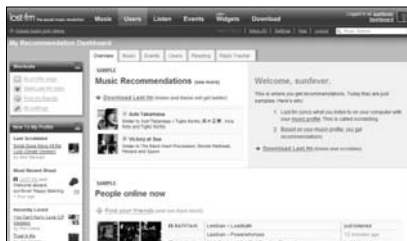
You can sort the music by Album, Artists or Playlists and can even create your own playlist by adding songs through a simple drag and drop from the main songs list window.

The next step is to share your music with your friends. To do that simply click on 'Invite a Friend' and either paste the given URL link into their instant messenger chat window or better yet send a direct e-mail from the site itself. You can invite up to 10 friends and they will get a few hours for trying out Ezmo without having to sign up for the service right away. The real collaborative power of Ezmo starts when your friends also sign up and upload their collection of songs to their Ezmo accounts. Because they have been added through invitation, the music and playlists they upload will also be available to you to listen to. You can now mix and match and explore the musical tastes of your friends and listen to songs you like but don't own without having to worry about its legality. Finally, if you have a Last.fm account you can also 'scrobble' your songs to Last.fm by simply providing your



Play back your music from any computer on the planet!

Last.fm username and password. What's scrobble? Look at the section on Last.fm that's coming up. It should also be noted that Ezmo is primarily a music sharing site that uses streaming technology to



Expand your musical horizons with Last.fm

play the songs back to you. At the moment you can't download the songs once you've uploaded it to the Ezmo service. So, take care not to trash the copies on your hard disk just yet.

## 4.6 Music Personalization—Last.fm

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Last.fm is a music tracking service that give you personalised feedback and features based on your music listening habits. You use Last.fm to listen to music, find out about new artists whose music you may enjoy, people with similar musical tastes, shows in your area, to create charts and widgets (known as quilts) of your musical tastes that you can embed in your Web site, blog or social network (like MySpace) page.

To start using Last.fm sign up for the service and download the Last.fm software. This installs to your hard disk and detects all the media players (iTunes, Windows Media Player, etc.) that are in use on your system. It will then download the appropriate plug-ins for each of the media players and sit in your system tray monitoring your music listening habits. This is known as scrobbling. In scrobbling, when you listen to a song on your computer using the media players whose plugins have been downloaded with the Last.fm software, the song name will be sent to your Last.fm music profile. Songs that you are listening to will also appear on your profile at Last.fm, and can be seen by others. Millions of songs from as many users are scrobbled on a daily basis. This data will help Last.fm organise the information online and recommend similar music. This information helps in personalising radio stations and making recommendations based on

the type of music that you listen to. The recommendations are based on the aggregate comparisons of users tastes. Thus, if a majority of users listening to Artist A also listen to Artist B then, new users who do not have Artist B in their list but listen to Artist A quite frequently will get a



Last.fm personalised music radio station based on your musical taste

recommendation to listen to Artist B, and vice versa. (Note that if you are using the Ezmo.com music listening service then you have the option to scrobble your song from there as well).

Once the Last.fm software is downloaded and installed it has two primary functions. It can act as an internet radio player or it can sit in your system tray monitoring the song that you play with your favorite media player, like Windows Media Player or iTunes. If you are using the radio you can specify an artist you like and it will start playing that song and based on that first recommendation it will play the subsequent songs with similar musical tastes.

If you are listening to the radio you can vote for whether you like the song or ban it. If you ban the song it won't be played again in your profile so be careful how you vote! If you don't want to hear to that particular song at that moment just hit the skip button. Another great feature of Last.fm is Neighbors. These are people who have similar musical tastes as you. The neighbors will get continually refined as time passes and Last.fm get a better idea of your musical tastes. However, you won't see neighbors right away after signing up as Last.fm needs to understand your music listening habits first. You will need to wait about a week and listen to at least 5 artists before the site starts to throw up information on your musical neighbors. These are but a few of the few of the features that are part of Last.fm. To really experience the difference it can make it your musical listening habits, you need to dive into it yourself.

## 4.7 Video Sharing—Broadcaster.com

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Broadcaster.com takes off from where YouTube stops. This site is touted as the next gen online community that enables users to become broadcasters of any shade and stripe. They can use Web cam video chat and broadcast themselves; or, they can become producers, broadcasting from play-lists of live and pre-recorded content.

The major goal of Broadcaster is to be a video sharing community site. It also provides some nifty tools which are free and which enables users to control and edit their programming. They can find an audience for their shows by inviting and adding other viewers to their friends list. They can then notify their audience of broadcast schedules and updates to the channel content.



Become a movie producer—connect with your friends and a global audience

User can create personal profiles and track all the videos they upload. Videos that are uploaded require to be approved before it can be shown. To upload videos use the upload video section of the site.

The mobile media section allows you to download clips to your cell phone, iPOD or PSP for easy viewing on the move.

The news section has streaming video news about the entertainment industry. Sorry no Bollywood and India coverage there yet but if you are a Hollywood rat you can tune in here to catch all the gossip and news from there.

The games section allows you to play games with other users or download premium games that you can play on your computer.

The music section gives you access to thousands of music videos from your favorite artists while the movies section will give you access to the latest movie trailers and also allow you to download full length movies. All for free.

The clincher though is the tools section. Broadcaster provides some powerful tools all for free. The VideoMail software enables you to give up on typing mail for good! Just record your video message and send it to your friends and even your boss! If you've got hooked on Broadcaster then download the Deskbar tool which will keep you posted with the latest on what's happening at Broadcaster. It can tell you when new video content is available on Broadcaster, when your friends pop up online and much more.

In addition to these two tools there is also StudioPro. This is a video stream capturing software that can capture video from any source on your computer whether it's a live stream across the Web or whether it is from your favorite media player. The stream which you capture can then be broadcast across the Net using your standard webcam software. In addition you can use a single webcam to connect to your various video chat services like Yahoo! and MSN simultaneously. Also, check out the iGrab, PodCast and Parental Lock. iGrab enables you to search and organise video and pictures from across the Web. Podcast enables you to sync videos from Broadcaster directly with your iPod and Parental Lock helps you protect your computer from being used to visit sites with inappropriate content.

## 4.8 Car Enthusiasts—Cardomain.com

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Looking for a place to rev your engines with other car lovers? Then head over to [cardomain.com](http://cardomain.com). Car Domain is the networking site for car lovers. When you join Car Domain they will ask you to specify your make of car and its year of manufacturing. If you don't have a car, don't worry, just input your favorite car and enter. Once you are past that screen you can browse through the listings of cars by other users or update your own profile and add pictures of your car.

You can also head over to the Groups section and join any of the groups which interest you or if you don't find anything to your liking, create your own group!

You can browse through pictures of what other car lovers have done with their cars. Vote for the ones you like and also comment on their pages. You can also nominate cars and users for Showoff of the week which will get the user and his or her car featured on the homepage for an entire week. The selection for the Showoff slot is based on a number of factors that the Car Domain staff look into diligently. This includes things like unique vehicle and design, interesting modifications to the factory specifications of the car and/or helpful suggestions for other members in getting the maximum out of their cars.

There is also an event calendar for car events but these are primarily US events so information on international and Indian events are pretty thin. Nevertheless, Car Domain has an international outlook and there are country specific sections, including India.

If you find any user that you would like to befriend simply click on the Add to My Friend List link at the upper part of the page. If a user's profile and car pictures have impressed you, go ahead and nominate him/her for the Showoff of the Week award. You can also forward by e-mail to friends any listing that you find especially interesting.



Get serious about cars



A car owner from Pune with Limited Edition Fiat Palio on Car Domain

There is also an elaborate rating system that will satisfy the desires of any car lover who wants people to appreciate that special mod applied to some obscure section of the car. There are about twenty one categories and you can rate each car for any or all of these categories. The rating is a 5 star system which tries to make it easy for you to choose your level of liking for the user's car or cars.

You can search for cars by make, year of manufacture, limit it to specific countries and set lots of other filter criteria to narrow down your search to users who have the features you are looking for. You can then interact with these members and find out more information about how to go about making the modifications for your vehicle or just get chatting with them. For the car enthusiast Car Domain can be a treasure trove for engaging in their primary passion: love of cars. It also provides a powerful forum for interaction with other members who can be helpful in providing useful feedback for your choices when modifying your car or just appreciate the mods you've done to your road monster.

## 4.9 Green Living—Care2.com

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If you are concerned about the way you are burning up the earth's resources and want to reorient your life along the lines of a more holistic life style Care2.com maybe what you need to join up. While TakingITGlobal looked at leadership and action issues, Care2 is more about promoting and living a healthy lifestyle while at the same time making a difference in the world around you.

With over 7 million members Care2 is a strong and vibrant community. You can connect to other people who have the same enthusiasm as you for specific causes, activities, interests, historic role models, movies and passions. For example you may be interested in meeting people who practice Yoga, or those interested in Animal Welfare or people who watch the same movie shows as you. Whatever be your choice you can find other people who share a common interest as you do.



If you are looking for a more participatory role, you can join groups that match your interest. There are about 40 categories ranging from Animals & Pets to Human Rights to Women's Issues. In each category there are hundreds if not thousands of group. At more than 13,400 groups, there is no shortage of groups that can be found aligned around your interest. In case you don't find anything which fits your specific interest you can create your own group to address the issue. You can also control access to the group and accept memberships by invitation only.



Join Care2 and make a difference

If you want to participate in hot button world issues like the race to stop global warming, save the rainforests and other endangered natural habitats, help in the fight against breast cancer, and so on, you use the click2donate feature. The Click2Donate feature works by contributing towards each of these causes based on your clicks, sponsors of these pages pay Care2 for each click that happens on the page of each cause.

You can use Care2's petition site in case you have a particular issue that you want to air and wish people to sign. The e-Petition section of the site enables you to create a petition and have it send to the particular person that should respond to the petition. You can then promote your petition and have other people sign it, thus increasing the validity of your request. You can also participate in submitting and voting for news stories. These will be promoted to the front page depending on the number of votes much like Digg.com.

For the fun part there are over 25,000 e-cards, all for free; a photos section where you can upload and share your pictures; create your own page, start a blog, share recipes, conduct online polls and pay tributes to those who made a difference. If you wish you



credibility in your profile you can then start planning your trips. Plan your itinerary and search for members who live within a few (say 20) kilometers or miles along your route. Contact members who you think will make a good fit and explain to them what sort of travel and stay you are interested in. There is a “Request to CouchSurf with...” button that enables you to include specific details. Once you’ve put in the request it is more than likely that you will get lots of offers for places to stay. You can then firm up your finally itinerary, send confirmations to your hosts, and fly off to the starting point of your tour route.

Depending on how you’ve set up with each host, some may even pick you up from the airport and show you around the city. They can invite you to meet friends and have dinner giving you a chance to sample authentic local cuisine. CouchSurfers are most helpful, they will in all likelihood be very hospitable and take you to see all the interesting places in the city or provide you useful tips on how to navigate your way through the city.

There are also some unwritten rules of good couchsurfing. You show your appreciation for your hosts in kind. While the hosts may not ask you to do anything around the house, you could help out by washing the dishes, making them an authentic Indian meal (or at least help out with the recipe if you don’t know how to cook!) or you may be (being a Digit reader!) an IT whiz and help them with some computer glitches.

Once you work through your itinerary and return home, you log into CouchSurfing, leave feedback about your hosts and see the feedback your hosts have left about you! The basic idea is to participate in the community and encourage the spirit of cooperation and sharing. Likewise if people are visiting your city keep a couch ready for them!

## 4.11 Genealogy—Geni.com

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Most Indian families are huge. It is more than likely that you have more than 20-30 cousins and not counting the odd uncleji and auntyji who are related to you but somehow your parents are never very clear about how they are related. If you've ever been driven up the wall by torturous twists of finding out how you are exactly related, or you have been embarrassed when a cousin who you don't know very well lands up with his family and you have absolutely no clue about the name of his kids, then Geni will be what you want.



Use Geni to connect to your family

Geni is a family tree and genealogy mapping site that is free to use and extremely intuitive. It gives you a dynamic, graphical tree structure interface to input details of your family and relatives. Family tree sites used to be cumbersome to use, but with Geni you can map your entire family tree in a snap. And maybe, just maybe, the Geni tagline “everyone’s related”, could just turn out to be true! You never know, your family tree may be a long lost branch of the Egyptian pharaohs!

Jokes aside, Geni can be a powerful way to organise and manage your extended family. Using Geni is very simple. Simply enter your name and other details on the home page and click ‘start my tree!’. The interface is a tree structure, which is the most intuitive and easiest to use for a genealogy list. Start entering the details of your siblings, spouse, kids and parents. Then expand from there to your other relatives. Remember that in each case you will need to make a connection to an existing relative before you can connect to a specific distant relation. For example, if you want to connect to your sister’s husband’s cousin you would first need to create a connection to your sister then enter her husband’s details, then enter your brother-in-law’s parents details, then enter the parent’s

siblings' details, then enter the cousin's details who is the child of one of your brother-in-law's parents' sibling! Confusing? No need to be. Simply enter your brother-in-law's name and e-mail address and create a link



A growing family tree

to him. Geni will automatically send him an e-mail asking him to join the family tree. Then ask him to fill out his portion of his family tree.

As with all collaborative endeavors, especially ones of this kind, where people need to actually sit and enter details there is a higher risk of failure. Filling forms is one of the most boring things anyone can do and don't be disappointed if you find that not everyone is as eager to find out about your extended as you. It will be up to you the creator of this family tree to keep the interest running high and be shamelessly persistent and obnoxious in getting your relatives to fill out their details on the family. You just have to ensure that you get their e-mail IDs right!

But once you get past that initial hurdle and you get a sufficient number of relatives to sign up you may be pleasantly surprised or scarily horrified at the number of relatives you have around the globe!

## 4.12 Professional IT Community— ITToolbox.com

To keep up with the frenzied pace of technological changes, IT professionals need to be constantly on their toes. ITToolbox can make this somewhat easier by consolidating nearly every aspect of IT into a single community space. There are groups, blogs, wikis and knowledge bases organized around multiple topics and categories.



**IT Professionals, get your skills upgrade all in one place!**

As with all social sites ITToolbox is oriented around the user. Users can join groups that interest them, participate in adding information to the wiki and also blog to their heart content on the subject of IT and more.

Groups are organised along two lines. Based on types: planning and strategy, vendor selection, technical & functional, and career. This view will give access to a broad listing of tens of hundreds of groups allowing you to browse and multi select the groups under each type that you would like to join.

If however, you are surer about your topics of interest, browse through topic list ranging from Business Intelligence to ERP to Project Management to Security. Each of these heads have a further level of topical sub-headings that enable the user to get a more fine grained approach to his area of interest. For example the Career headings has further sub headings dealing with careers in Data Management to careers in Project Management. Clicking on each of these will give you access to one or more groups dealing with specific issues under each head.

Blogs are where you get to show off your tech writing, or to read the posts of more knowledgeable peers who will wax eloquent on anything which is of interest to them. Again, blogs are across all types of topics starting from the ERP system BAAN all the way to Wireless related blogs. As is usual with blogs you also have RSS subscriptions for all blogs, blog comments, popular blogs and new blog announcements. RSS feeds are not just for blogs though. There are feeds from other content centers which you can subscribe to. These are grouped as: research, job center, events and white papers as the major headings. Under each of these categories you subscribe to the actual feed which could be from CRM to Networking Infrastructure to IT Management and Trends.

The Wiki section is where you get collaborative and create your own definitions, FAQs and how tos. This works along the lines of wiki entries where you can contribute content or edit existing content in various categories. These are grouped under Hardware, Software, Services, Strategy & Planning and Career. However, to reach your content by browsing may be a bit cumbersome as you need to click through multiple sub-category headings before you reach the actual article page. This usability problem aside the wikis do provide useful information that has been contributed by experienced members in the field.

The Knowledge Base is simply a grouping of the various groups, blogs, wikis and other content by relevant topics. Clicking on any of the topics will show you the top blogs, wiki entries, groups, white papers and jobs related to that topic along with other related content.

## 4.13 Developers Networking—Dzone.com

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While ITToolbox tries to cater to the needs of all technology professionals, DZone is only interested in one type of techie: The Developer. Yes that is right DZone is meant only for all you code jockeys out there! The site is still young so there is a slightly raw

edge to it. Developers though will find the user submitted link section on the front page interesting as this will keep him/her abreast with the latest in the world of software development. All the zones are not yet fully developed. There are quite a few that are still up coming like vista, ruby, usability and more. However, the user interface is simple and easy to navigate. Finding all the different areas at DZone can be a bit confusing as it is buried in a drop down link at the top left corner of the site. Clicking on the link gives you access to the different, so called, zones with DZone.

Joining Dzone gives you access to developer specific resources that will be of deep interest to both beginning developers as well as to experienced hands. There are places like Javalobby, EclipseZone, JRoller, JavaForge and more, where you can hang out and get talking and making friends with members in that community. There are exclusive developer forums, newsletters you can subscribe to, articles on various aspects of development, software downloads, and special discounts for purchase of various products. You also get access to online demos and presentations from top experts in the field and the ability to personalize the site to your needs. Of course, as with any social site you can submit your own content, create a blog, vote on topics and participate in all the discussions on the site.



Share your code recipes with the community

The zones Javalobby, Eclipse zone and Jroller are devoted to, as the name suggests, Java, the Eclipse IDE and blogging about Java respectively. Each of these sites follow a somewhat similar format. There is a featured articles section, where industry heavyweights contribute content on various aspects, a tips and tricks section and the latest discussions which are ranging the forums.



There is also the useful JDocs Java API documentation repository. This is somewhat different from the documentation that ships with JDK. Users get access to the class source code if available, the ability to leave notes and jump through code references to different APIs. The Dzone Snippets section allows users to submit and share their personal collection of code snippets categorized by tagged and keywords.

The Javaforge zone is somewhat similar to Sourceforge but in this case it is a scalable project hosting platform for Java projects. Basic Web hosting, code repositories, bug trackers, forums, wikis and document repositories are what is provided. There is also a build system that can commit notifications to the repository and the community. Finally there is the DZone Jobs listing which helps programmers and employers connect. The jobs listings are categorized into programming, design, management, sales and other. These listings and almost all the content on the Dzone network is, as is to be expected, all subscribeable via RSS.

## 4.14 Go crazy over Cars, Bikes, Boats and Planes!—Motortopia.com

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Unlike Cars Domain, Motortopia goes beyond just cars. You can also rave to your friends about bikes, boats and planes!

The site is definitely a step up from Cars Domain, at least in look and feel. The features though remain pretty much the same. There is the garage where you showcase off your hot machines—you can post tons of photos. You can find out about local motoring events, participate in groups and forums related to specific interest areas, find local local clubs and much more. Once you've signed up you can go about filling in your profile details, adding vehicles to your garage. Note that you have to each type of vehicle—car, bike, boat, or plane—separately, in each its own garage. The garage is the place where you post your photographs about your vehicles. You can also post parts for sales or parts wanted infor-

mation which will allow other members to review the parts information and respond as appropriate. You can also add photo albums and videos of your vehicles. Finally you can blog about your vehicles and related topics and post them to appropriate sections of the site under one or more the vehicle categories with a single click of the button.



Get the fix for your motoring addiction at Motortopia

Once you've done the basic setup, go over to the 'invite' section and invite your other motor maniacs by entering their e-mail ids manually or by connecting to your Yahoo, Gmail, AOL or Hotmail contact list. You can send them a customized message telling them what fun you are having with posting your vehicle pics and how you would also like to see theirs up there. You can also track the status of your invite and know when your friends have signed up.

While you are waiting for your friends to show up go check out the specific vehicle section, where you can go goggle-eyed and drool over some of the meanest machines on the planet. There is a featured vehicle, sure to make you green envy, unless you something seriously in the same class or better. The newest vehicle pictures show you a near real time view of the vehicles' pictures that are currently being uploaded by members. The top rated vehicles are the ones which members have voted for while the most viewed cars are the ones which members have most drooled over! Of course there is also the most commented vehicles section—imagine whistling at vehicles rather than chicks! Finally, you can put also put up your machines for sale and it will get showcased in the for sale section.

And when you really get your engines fired up and going you can get featured in the people section. Show off your cars, main-

tain one or more journals and link up with your friends. Get people to visit your garage and wow them with the pictures you have. Also check out the challenges section, browse the photos and videos, check out the latest news and events. See if there are any clubs and groups catering to your specific motoring passion and if not maybe you can create one! And if you are looking to buy or sell parts don't forget to browse the parts section. One problem you will face is that the content is primarily US oriented so you will need to work on building your own group of motoring enthusiasts with an India focus. Apart from this, Motortopia is a well thought out motoring community site that can give you hours of fun and pleasure pursuing your passion for vehicles.

## 4.15 India Travel—Oktatabyebye.com

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Oktatabyebye even with its quirky name is fast evolving into the online destination for Indian travel bugs. With its strong community orientation, Indian travelers can find travel advice, information, experiences, and tips 'n tricks about getting out on the Indian roads.



The Indian travel community's online watering hole

Travel information is not just about what's the best room rate and the cheapest ticket to your holiday destination. Experiences are much more important and getting a feel of the local flavor and culture is just as important. Oktatabyebye is capitalizing on the increasing enthusiasm for the Indian consumer to get out on the roads and explore 'the great Indian outdoors'. Travelers can write travelogs, upload pictures of their travel, write recommendations for friends, family and other members on the site. There is a high degree of transparency through reviews and votes which

ensures that you get quite accurate information with fellow travelers to the same area contributing their experiences that may complement or contrast with yours. This will give you a better understanding of what to expect when you land up in a place. Of course, don't forget to contribute back your experiences to the site as this way you can give your unique insights into the places you've visited. The site has many features that travelers will like. Some of them are:

The travelog—the traveller's version of a blog—allows them to share their experiences of hoofing it around the country and gives you enough fodder to plan your next trip. Talkjunction is more informal and largely revolves around travelers who want to ask some question regarding their destination. Members who've been there before are helpful in supplying answers and helping out. There is also travel talk which is more like a hang out for sharing anecdotes and useful travel trips. Picture gallery is where you justify going crazy with your digital camera. Travel buddies is a kind of collaborative site where you can look out for other members making trips and join up with them or even put out your own trip plans and budgets and get others to join up with you. For all those horror stories about hotels, the Hotels section is where you go and find reviews about the hotel you are planning to stay in. And if you can't find any, just bite the bullet, stay at the hotel and then submit a review! This will help out a fellow traveler who will follow in your footsteps.

Other than these features, there are also compilations of places and activities experienced by travelers, an event calendar, biker's tales in Road and Rides. They also have a rewards section that will enable you to get some freebies in exchange for the contributions you make, along with awards and accolades. The latest (and coolest!) feature though is Travel Directions. Select a starting point and you will get a listing of the various destinations you go can go to from there. Select the destination and you will get road directions to the destination much like a rally tulip chart. Way cool! This is a relatively new feature so there aren't too many des-

tinations yet but you too can submit a destination that you think should be included and help them build the information. What's more you can get the directions SMSed to your mobile!

## 4.16 Dog lovers get together—dogster.com

Dog lovers never had it so good. Here is a site devoted to dog owners and their dogs. The tag line is “where every dog has a page”! If you are crazy about dogs and want to get together with other dog enthusiasts this is where you come to.



Dog lovers of the world unite!

The site has an US orientation, apart from which, the site contains lots of useful information regarding taking care of your pet. You will find information regarding nearly all breeds and its unlikely that you will come away without getting some useful information.

The site is primarily organized around forums, and you can join groups that cater to your interest. There is a section where you can set up a profile page for your dog, along with pictures and videos that you know that you “just must” share with the rest of the world.

On the profile page for your dog, or each dog that you own (if you have more than one), you can fill out interesting bits of information about your pet ranging from how you got your pet, what its pet peeves are, favorite foods, toys and other interesting tit bits that only another dog lover will understand! Once you've put up some interesting information on the profile you can then look forward to your fellow dog lovers to drop in and vote on your dog's profile.

The forum is the place to head to when you want help and information on how to handle some crisis with your pet and need some urgent help in getting good advice. Beyond emergencies the forums also contain lots of useful information regarding different aspects of taking care of your dog—ranging from dog health, behavior and training, to travelling with dogs and much more.

Other than forums, there is also groups which are totally member controlled. Groups can be created by members with dogs and can be about anything which the member wants to discuss about. You can control who you can invite to the group, who participates and what the group is about. You also get complete control on what the members can and cannot do within the group.

The videos section is where you get to showcase those special moments with your dog that you know will have fellow dog lovers excited and appreciative! Just shoot your video and upload it from your account page.

The account page is also where you go to set up your personal profile, your dog's profile, set up your account preferences and subscribe to newsletters. Many of the features of the site will not be relevant till you put up at least one profile of your dog.

## 4.17 Movie Ratings—[flixster.com](http://flixster.com)

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With more than 30,000 movies rated on Flixster, you can quickly find the rating for a movie you are going to watch and decide whether it is going to be worth your while. Flixster allows you to rate movies and share it with your friends and as well as sort s of movie related information, trivia, pictures, videos, quizzes and more.

As with other social sites you can invite your friends to join up too during the sign up process. Once signed in spent a few minutes sprucing up your profile by adding skins, uploading your photo or adding an avatar, and putting up something about yourself that

the community can see and understand the kind of person you are. Finally, before getting into the site take the movie compatibility test to find out what your affinity is with your friends. Once you've invited enough friends you can get a compatibility score with your friends which will at least help you decide who to go the movies with!



Share movie ratings with friends

You can search for specific movies or go check out the movies playing in theaters or available on DVD and read the reviews and get a summary of Flixster members' overall rating for a particular movie. You can also submit your ratings and comments for movies that you have watched, flag ones that you haven't watched and wish to watch, and flag ones that you haven't watched and are seriously not interested in watching. This kind of information helps Flixster take a shot at guessing your likes and dislikes of the movie genres. You can recommend movies to friends, and also invite them to watch the movie.

If you are in the mood for rating movies just go to the Rate Movie link and give your comments and opinions on movies that are randomly presented to you. If you haven't watched the movie you can either flag it as 'want to see it' or 'not interested'. Once you've given your rating for a movie, another one will be presented to you till you decide to quit!

To get all the info on your favorite actors go over to the actor section. You get to see a random selection of actors and actresses and clicking on any one will take you to their bio and filmography page. You can of course also search for them by name or movie. Adding them to your favorites helps you keep track of all your favorite actors in one central location. You can also stay plugged in

to the latest news from tinsel town which you can share, discuss and comment on with your friends and other members.

One of the neatest features of Flixster is its integration with other social networking sites and blogging sites like My Space and Blogger. You can paste code from Flixster into any of these sites and your movie ratings, lists and other information which you wish to publish can be streamed directly to your main blog site. This and other cool features make Flixster a special treat for the movie buff looking to stay up to date on the latest happenings from the silver screen.

## 4.18 Party Planning—mypunchbowl.com

If you've ever gone through the hassle of managing the invitations and keeping track of everything for a party then you will understand what Mypunchbowl does. Mypunchbowl is an online party organizer that takes the sting out of planning large parties



Taking the pain out of party invites

The planning process is fairly simple and straight forward, an easy to use wizard interface takes you through each step of the planning so that you are not stuck with any loose ends which unravel at the last minute.

The wizard will ask you whether you want its help to pick a date. Unless you are celebrating some US holiday you will want to ignore that and choose to pick your own date. You can choose a design for your invitation card and then fill out the details on your card. You can include a picture and driving directions to your



residence using Google Maps though the accuracy of the maps outside countries where Google Maps has accurate road data is questionable. There have been some major updates to the Google Earth data—the parent source for Google Maps—for many Indian cities so you might just be lucky there that Google Maps is able to recognize your address. Finally you round it off by typing a custom invitation message and e-mailing out the invites to the guests. You can also import your guest lists from your Outlook address book or your contacts list in your favorite e-mail program like AOL, Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo and others. You can also set up specific RSVP responses and also how many guests your friends can bring along with them. Once satisfied with your selections you can add a custom message and subject line and your invitation will be e-mailed out to your friends list. You can then monitor the responses before deciding on what all you need for the party. You can specify a minimum number of days before which you expect the responses after which you can decide on your final guest list and go about shopping for supplies.

Once the party is over you can use the After Party section to invite the guests (those who didn't turn up you can invite optionally) to come in and view the pictures and video taken at the party. The pictures should be hosted on Flickr and any videos should be uploaded to YouTube.

# Business Networking



**S**ocial networking isn't all about finding people who share your interests or making new friends. It's no secret that the most successful professionals are the ones with strong, well-established contacts, and the Web 2.0 revolution has now made it much easier.

## 5.1 Biznik.com

Independent professionals and small business owners have always needed to depend on their own wits to manage their time and resources to get ahead in their chosen professions. Biznik operates on the concept of ‘radical self-promotion’.



The easy way to high quality business networking

The basic premise is that business is not about ‘me-first-take-no-prisoners’ but has to do with collaboration and cooperation. Biznik provides a platform to connect with other members in similar and allied professions in your city, country and anywhere on the planet.

The primary vehicle to establishing yourself in your city is to network with other professionals in your field or complementary fields. Biznik gives you the platform to organize events to which other Biznik members are invited and you share and exchange information regarding your profession or business.

Events can be either free or fee based. A fee based event requires that you become a paid member of Biznik. There are two levels of paid members—active and supporting. Active members pay \$10 per month and supporting members pay \$24 per month. If you are a free member the event that you host must also be free. For all meetings, free or paid, there are some guidelines which you have to adhere to, including the fact that 95 per cent of your meetings should be useful material and only 5 per cent self-promotion. All Biznik events are members only. If you as the event organiser wish to invite outsiders or the general public then the

event will not be listed in the Biznik event calendar, but can be posted in the Biznik forum—Biztalk.

For members only events, Biznik will manage the entire event including collecting the RSVPs from each member who confirms their intent to participate. If it is a paid event, Biznik will also charge a small fee on top of your event fee, which the members who participate in your event pay for.

The easiest way to get ahead in Biznik is to fill out your full profile with all the relevant details, invite your friends to join up and start interacting with members in your region, and by participating in the discussion boards. With every member's profile up on the network, you get some quick and easy tools to connect to them. When you see a post that has been helpful to you, send the member a compliment, this will be a first step in getting friendly with the member. Keeping the 95:5 rule of self promotion don't send a compliment just to build your network, members are smart and can quickly decipher when you are just trying to spam them.

By consistently sharing valuable information with your peers in Biznik you will gain their trust and this will eventually have a multiplier effect. As with any networking site, the strength of your network is going to be driven by the amount of time and effort you put into it. Luckily, the amount of effort required is not so huge and as you get more familiar with the other members you can create powerful and valuable partnerships that could result in a win-win situation for both sides.

## 5.2 Networking By Numbers—LinkedIn.com

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Where Biznik focuses on building your network through close interpersonal interactions, LinkedIn focuses more on the networking effects of building a constellation of network contacts that you can reach out to when you are looking for a service, a job, a person or a collaborator.

Once you sign up, the first step to get anywhere is to import all your e-mail contacts and find out if they are already on LinkedIn. In all likelihood, at least a couple should be. This will give you enough a head start to going ahead and building your network. You may also invite the people in your address book to join and participate in the LinkedIn network. The contact list can be either from your e-mail client like Outlook or Outlook Express, or from your Web mail accounts like Gmail, Yahoo!, Hotmail or AOL.



Connect to your peers and colleagues from around the globe

LinkedIn works on the principle of three degrees of separation. It assumes that if you trust the friends and contacts who are linked directly to you, then you will also trust any of the persons who are linked to your direct friends and contacts. Based on this trust your network of access to professionals in many fields will increase with time as the number of contacts in your direct network grow. As your network grows you will be able to gain access to an ever-widening collection of people who can be a source of business opportunity or assistance.

The key to creating a solid network is to keep your profile updated and accurate in all respects. Thus, if someone is looking for a person with a specific skill set that matches yours, then you have a higher likelihood of securing that assignment due to your direct familiarity with the contact or due to common friends you both trust. Building your network and maintaining an up to date and accurate profile are the only active tasks you need to be careful about to promote your network. You can further increase your visibility by getting your colleagues, business partners, customers and service providers to provide you with recommendations on your skills and other aspects. Likewise you can provide recom-

mentations for deserving people in your contact list and who are part of the LinkedIn network.

There are many nifty features on the site that work silently and unobtrusively, collecting and collating data and providing details on various aspects through your network connections. For example based on your job profile listing you can expect to see job opportunities from your network list popping up in your home page. You can also search for jobs or if you wish to find someone to work for your business or company you can use the various hiring services option that will enable you to get access to quality people. Barebones statistics of the progress of your network and the connections available through your contacts are also shown. When one or more friends add a same mutual friend, LinkedIn will ask you whether you know the mutual friend too!

Building a quality network will take time so you will need to be patient. However, if patience is not one of your virtues or you do need to contact a specific person whose profile you've just discovered then consider upgrading to a paid account which will enable you to contact the 11 million LinkedIn members directly.

### 5.3 Relationship Networking—Ryze.com

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Ryze is one of the earliest business networking communities and still going strong. One of the strongest attractions for members is the sense of belonging that seems to flow within the Ryze community. This we suspect is the real secret sauce that has enabled Ryze to survive the onslaught of much more sophisticated and focused business networking sites like LinkedIn and Biznik.

After signing up, somewhat like LinkedIn your Ryze home page will show you the number of friends you have and in turn the friends they have plus any pending friend requests. As you start filling your profile this will start getting replaced with your personal details. To get around to building your network on Ryze,

start by filling out your profile as completely as you can. Upload a picture to your profile. This instantly triples the chances of someone checking your profile out. This is very similar to remembering someone you met in person to remembering someone you spoke to on the phone.



Build relationships with Ryze

Search for friends who may already be on Ryze and link up to them. Upgrading to Gold (paid) memberships will also be helpful in improving your network. Visit the networks section and select one or two networks that are of interest to you. This will give you a leg up into the forum where long time Ryze members participate. You can interact with them and maybe get around to adding them as friends. Visit the pages of existing members who share similar interests and leave a friendly message in the guestbook, you will in almost all cases get a reciprocal message that is just as kind. Finally, invite friends and colleagues who you think might benefit from joining Ryze.

While it is generally assumed that you will have meaningful exchanges that are useful, Ryze also provides you with the facility to block any member that you do not want to communicate with. In addition to the above there is also an Events page and a Classifieds page which you can use to publicize specific events and advertise your products and services. There is a basic free listing service that can be upgraded to a paid listing for increased visibility.

The primary mechanism that Ryze opens is on trust. Building this trust is a step by step process that requires you to diligently participate in the community and interact with other Ryze members either directly or through the networks you have signed up for or through participating in events that involve Ryze members.

There are many testimonials on the site which reaffirm the benefits of focusing on business networking with people who have similar interests and business requirements as yourself. This kind of link building will eventually pay for itself as you reach critical mass with the number of members that you have as your friends. While not all members will be in touch with you simultaneously, you will have built a resource of different skill sets that you can quickly call upon whenever you are in need. This however is true for all networking sites.

## 5.4 Matchmaking Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur—PeopleThatClick.com

People That Click has a very simple mission. They want to hook up “good people (together) and provide them with practical tools and resources to help them start successful business relationships”. While it might sound far-fetched on first reading, what is intriguing is the exact manner in which they go about this hooking up.

It begins with an e-Profiling exercise where you are asked a set of questions regarding various attitudes you have. This ten-minute session will give them sufficient input to build your psychology profile based on statistical patterns and historic analysis of similar answers. Based on the profile your entrepreneurial attitude is categorised into one of six types of entrepreneurs. A detailed report is generated which will give you

Find out your entrepreneur psyche and sync up with complementary business partners



insight into your personal strengths and weaknesses and will discuss issues that you would have along with suggested remedies to ensure that your venture doesn't fail due to your weakness.

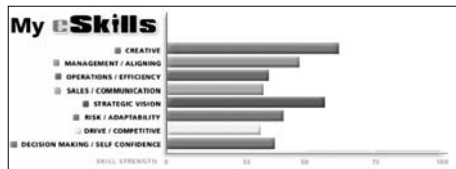
The report will also suggest types of businesses that you could think of starting and will also offer suggestions on types of entrepreneurs that you could pair with. For example the entrepreneur type "Innovation Artist" is best suited with partners who are of the type "General Manager", "Professional Proprietor", or another "Innovation Artist". The report would then suggest interacting with seeking out these type of partners to ensure your business success.

Of course, this profiling is only a guideline and need not necessarily mean that you are stuck in a specific rut because of your profile. However when you read through the report you will invariably find a grain of truth in it regarding certain strengths and weaknesses you have which should give you sufficient occasion to pause and consider. Once you are done with the profiling log into your account using the myPTC button and input all your profile details. Be as thorough as possible as you are seeking to attract a business partner through your interaction on the site. There are many places you can head to and each is designed for a specific purpose.

The Community section has three forums: the Café, the eProfile Place, and the Business Opportunity Center. The Café is where you go to hang out and chill and exchange informal information regarding entrepreneurship. The eProfile Place is the matchmaking center; here is where you whip out your eProfile report and look for complementary entrepreneur types who will act as a balance to your profile. For example if you are the easily distracted type, then you need to find someone who will love taking care of minor details. The Business Opportunity Center is where you fire up your idea engines and go seeking partnerships and help in incubating your idea to fruition. To get inspiration from other entrepreneurs, browse through the success stories

section. To get help and access to practical tools that will help you start and grow your business in a structured manner visit the Entrepreneur's Tool

Box section. This section contains a wealth of information regarding how to start, finance, grow and manage your business. Click on each topic to get access to Web resources, books and other tools that will help you get you up and running and keep you there. With the strong focus on the budding entrepreneur People That Click maybe the first resource that any savvy entrepreneur should consider.



Entrepreneurial Skills Analysis

## 5.5 Sharing Business Travel Plans—PairUp.com

PairUp tries to address an unique problem that people attending events and conferences face. When attending an event, people tend to miss opportunities to meet with peers and colleagues in the same industry. PairUp promises to make that a thing of the past.

Business travelers who travel frequently often miss opportunities to meet with peers and colleagues because they did not know that they were in the same area for the same event at the same time. Using PairUp, members share their travel plans with people whom they wish to discover and connect



Road warriors catch up with colleagues and friends

to and create potential business connections at conventions, conferences, exhibitions, trade shows as well as general business trips. This kind of awareness of colleagues and peers travelling makes for a more efficient pairing, which will allow you to leverage the relationship and increase networking opportunities.

How it works is that you sign up with PairUp and upload all your business contacts into its database. Once that is done, you enter the details of your event and travel plans to the event. Next you search for other PairUp users (in your industry or allied industries) who will be in the area or attending the event at the same time. Coordinate meetings and activities with these select people and get confirmation from them on their willingness to meet. Finally be alerted when the colleagues and industry peers you know are coming to town.

This is a very cool service that has the potential to become very important to meeting business colleagues for the simple reason that it is a very powerful tool. Business travelers are one of the few people who find it to difficult to effectively network due to their constant travel. PairUp uses data from your business contact list to create a list of potential candidates you can network with at the events and conferences that you will be attending.

## 5.6 Stock Market Investing—SocialPicks.com

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Social Picks is a community for stock market investors where people share their ideas on investment strategies, track the performance of peers' portfolios, and also track the stock picks of investment gurus like Warren Buffet (the second richest man in the world), professional stock analysts, and financial bloggers.

The way to become a good investor who maximizes returns on your investment in the stock market is to spend the time and energy studying your investment options and determining the most valuable investment that you can make. However, this does not

mean that you need to do all this hard work on your own. By listening to ideas from other smart people you will be able to take advantage of each others' strengths by combining the available resources and ideas, which in turn will lead to smarter investment strategies that can help individual investors get the best out of the market. This is the basis of how Social Picks operates.

Social Picks works by using what is known as a SocialPicks Point System. Members can submit stock picks they think will do well in the market and other members can vote on the pick, if they agree. This is a qualitative indication of the value of the pick given by the individual investors.

Each member of the site has a score and depending on the history of previous picks and votes the score will vary. When a member offers a new pick, his personal score will go towards ranking the pick. When another member votes on the pick, his score at that point in time will be added proportionately to the pick's total points. Individuals' scores are extremely dynamic and are updated several times a day. Another useful tool is the similarity tool that enables users to compare themselves with other social pickers. Your investment strategy will determine your similarity. If you are a day trader, your profile will be matched with similar day traders. In addition to relying on members picks, social picks also relies on outside gurus, like financial bloggers and the published information from professional analysts and top investors like Warren Buffet. This information is also taken into account when determining a stock's ranking.

Once you are signed in you can invite your friends and colleagues to join up with you on Social Picks. You can then set up

Invest your money using ideas from people you trust

your portfolio and watch its performance in comparison with other Social Pickers. Go to the people section of the site and review the top experts, the top performers and the top writers. You can subscribe to any of them which you like and watch their activities to get tips on how you should go about with your investments too. Other than site members, you can also review stocks from top financial bloggers, investment gurus, banks and analysts. Each member has a SP Score, an average return on investment (based on picks), an accuracy rating and much more. This will give you a quick snapshot of the person's investment "genius" and enable you to decide whether you can depend on his/her recommendations.

## 5.7 Asian and Far East Business Networking—xing.com

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Xing is another network which is predominantly servicing the Asian and Far East community. Not through design apparently but through affinity. For those of you whose business takes you to the Far East, Xing maybe a better bet than other business networks in building up your contact base.

As with other social networks Xing allows you to interface with your e-mail address book from your favorite e-mail client (Outlook etc) or to pull your contact list from your web mail account (Gmail,

Yahoo etc). In either case you can both import all the contacts and mail them asking them to join you on Xing or you can do an Address comparison to find out which of your friends are already on Xing and link up to them first.



Expand your contact network

The easiest way to start interacting on Xing is join up a group that fits within your spectrum of interest. Interacting with members will enable you to introduce yourself to other members, which in turn can translate to link building with those members and expanding your contact of networks. You can use the events center to post information about upcoming events and see new events in your area. The latest addition is the Xing Marketplace, which you can use to search for Jobs (free members), Real Estate and Services (premium members).

# Educational



**E**ver since the dawn of the Internet, there have been numerous Web sites that have delivered educational content to its users. These days however, Web sites are starting to take advantage of the 'social' phenomena that is gripping the Web and using it to create updated content and interactive learning on their Web sites. This chapter gives you an insight into 'Social learning' on the Web and reviews the Web sites that are engaged in it.

## What is *Social Learning*?

The Internet offers a vast amount of information that a user can gather. Social Learning on the Internet can be categorised into broadly two areas. One in which Web sites cater to needs of individuals who require access to information that may or may not be academic in nature and the other that solely caters to academia, e.g. physics courses etc.

### 6.1 General

Thanks to the *Web 2.0* phenomena, there are many Web sites that make use of the interactive technologies that have evolved on the Internet to harness the power of socially created content. These Web sites are typically community based and users can interact with one and other to get their queries resolved. We take a look at some of the Web sites out there:

#### 6.1.1 Yahoo! Answers (<http://in.answers.yahoo.com>)

The Web site describes itself as being one place in the world where everyone shares what they know to answer questions and

Yahoo! Answers



help each other out. The Web site works on a simple philosophy where as a user; you can post a question, which may be answered by fellow users or browse questions in order to answer them. The Yahoo! Answers service is free and can be logged into from your Yahoo! Account id.

The Yahoo! Answers Web site categorises every question into a multitude of sub-categories. There are a wide range of categories to choose from on the Web site, from “Arts & Humanities”, “Beauty & Style” to the more serious “Politics & Government” variety. They also have a section called “Best of Answers” which catalogues all the best answers that questions have received.

### **Creating Your Profile**

As soon as you log into the Web site and are ready to ask your question, you are confronted with a page to create your online profile first. Here, the user can create a username, customise their avatar and specify an e-mail address to which he is notified when his question receives an answer.

### **Asking A Question**

After logging into the site, to ask a question, just click onto the ‘ask’ tab in the new page that opens up, you can enter your question and add more details. After clicking ‘next’, you get to categorise your question into various sub-directories. What impressed us most about this step is that Yahoo! Answers gave a list of the most probable categorisations, automatically choosing the best option every time! Once that is done, the site allows you to preview how your question will look and gives you the option of modifying it. When that is done, you can select ‘OK’.

### **Scoring**

To increase competition and improve the quality of answers on the site, there is a scoring system which users can compete for. The score indicates how reputable or helpful a user you have been in the community. Also, when you answer a question, your score increases. Users can vote for the best answer to a question

and getting nominated as the best answer again increases your overall score.

Here is a summary of the points table:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Points</b>
Begin participating on Yahoo! Answers	One time: 100
Ask a question	-5
Choose a best answer for your question	3
Answer a question	2
Deleting an answer	-2
Log in to Yahoo! Answers	Once daily: 1
Vote for a best answer	1
Vote for No best answer	0
Your answer being selected as the best answer	10

Receive a “thumbs-up” rating on a best answer that you wrote (up to 50 thumbs-up are counted) 1 per “thumbs-up”

### **Answering A Question**

If you are in the volunteering mood then you can help out by answering a question. To answer any question, you can choose from a list of most recent questions displayed on the front page or choose a question from the sub-categories based on your preferences. Once a question has been selected, you just need to click onto a button ‘Answer this Question’, placed ideally below the question itself. Once you have clicked onto the button you get to answer the question and list any reference sources you might have used to gather that information.

### **Community Feel**

The community touch in Yahoo! Answers is enhanced by the ‘discover’ tab which allows the user to network with other users on a site. Networked users get notified when someone in their network posts a question or answers a question.

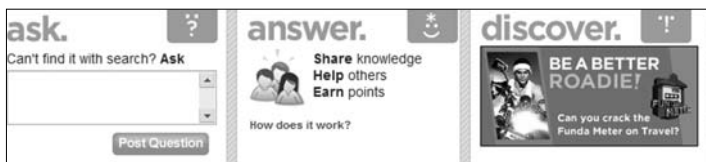
We decided to try out Yahoo! Answers, and asked, “I have two left feet and would like to know if dancing is a talent or can it be

learnt?” We were pleasantly surprised to find twenty two replies to our question! Most of them on the same day! The answers ranged from being informative to encouraging, to some being plain silly.

This made us feel like we truly belonged in the community. A place where we could get our daily answers sorted.

### Look And Feel

The look and feel of the Web site is very *Web 2.0ish*, The interface of the Web site is very easy to use and does not focus away from the core selling point of the site; which is to ask and answer questions. Once you get the hang of the ‘ask’, ‘answer’ and ‘discover’ tabs at the top, you are completely in control, all the time.



The navigational menu at Yahoo! Answers

### In Sum

We were impressed with the site’s focus on privacy and security. If an offensive or inappropriate question is posted, it can be quickly flagged by users for removal from the site. Replies can also be flagged if deemed inappropriate. A positive or a negative score can be given to a reply which will then push it either up or down in the list of replies. We are impressed.

### 6.1.2 Free Knowledge Exchange ([www.3form.org](http://www.3form.org))

One of the first knowledge market based Web sites in the world, The Free Knowledge Exchange is a site that allows its users to answer random queries of its users. Founded in February 1999, the site is free from any of the annoyances you normally see in

its modern counterparts these days. The reason why anyone would like to go to this site is that you can provide custom solutions to problems at hand. A Google search is not always handy when you want to know which coloured socks match with your blue sneakers.

### Getting In

A user can participate on the Web site by registering a free account. The procedure requires no extra information from the user; the user may include his/her e-mail address along with his interests in the next field. The user can register under any name; it is used only to keep track of their problems and score. The username is not shown to others and nor is it printed next to the question you post. The Web site considers it important that all messages are posted anonymously so that they are evaluated without any subjective influence of any kind.

### The Problem Page

When the user is in, he/she see a list of problems standing before the community. Next to each question there is a selection box that allows you to evaluate the question or add it to your interest list to answer later.

### Rating

The Free Knowledge Exchange site is designed in such a way that all answers are paid equal attention to but the process of which questions should appear on the front page is based on the rating of the member posting the question. This seems fair to us, since these users contribute the most by solving most problems and spending a large portion of their time everyday on the Web site. They deserve to have their own problems solved quickly.



Choose which question you want to answer

The rating on the site is not any measure of intelligence or abilities. It just shows the credit that the community owes to the certain user for helping them. It is also a measure to check the level of contribution to the community.

### **The Solving Problems Page**

The problems on this page have an optional list of suggestive answers the user can choose. These answers have been collaboratively filtered by different users answering the question differently. If the user does not find an appropriate solution, he/she can submit his own solution instead.

If the user chooses an answer from the list, the rating of the person who originally answered the query increases. The identity of all users always remains anonymous during this entire process. The value of the rating depends on the number of options the user was given in the page; the reward for a solution chosen out of 5 alternatives is greater than if there were 2 alternatives. If the user deems all the listed answers as incorrect or has a better answer, he can submit the solution in the text box below the problem. Since there is no fine for incorrect answers, the user's rating is not affected in any way.

### **Posting Your Problem**

A query question can be posted at the end of the question list. Do not forget that many questions that can be answered instantly by using Web search. If you suspect your question falls into this category, try to use search first.

We posted the same query as we did on Yahoo! Answers, only to find that it did not figure on the front page at all! This was because our rating on the site was not adequate enough. We felt a tad disappointed with this. We feel that any new user who registers to the site will only want to ask a question first. If his/her question is not answered, why would they hang around?

### **In Sum**

The Free Knowledge Exchange site is a completely no-frills Web

	problems are being accepted to be measured. What might be the set of questions, answers and the interpretation. One point should be reminded to all of us, the approach should be totally, 'noncommercial' in nature, for the concerned field is 'Spirituality'.
<input type="checkbox"/>	the end of suffering comes from the living of joy (messiah seed) <input type="button" value="Q"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fulfilment looks to me like a yes or no problem, not a question of quantity. Either you are fulfilled or you are not. I think that one should better talk about "satisfaction" or "happiness", although both of them are also difficult to quantify. <input type="button" value="Q"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>
Q <sub>6</sub>	Category <input type="text" value="General"/> Is Digit the best technology magazine in India? <input type="button" value="Q"/>
A	<input type="text" value="Yes!"/>
	<input type="button" value="Submit"/>

Choose which question you want to answer

site. The only service it offers is to ask queries and answering some. The site design doesn't look like it has been updated in a few years. Still sporting those animated .gif files. The navigation system also looks ancient and needs an overhaul. The site is not for everyone though. If you are interested in just helping people out and want a bare-bones site, this is where you should head to.

### 6.1.3 Lycos IQ (<http://iq.lycos.co.uk/>)

This Web site is another community driven search site where users can ask questions and reply to queries for which they have answers. The differentiating factor for Lycos IQ is that it stores all its information based on tags. Each and every question can be tagged on the Web site, making it easier to find a question related to your query.

## Network

The Lycos IQ network consists of users who add each other based on their preferences. The users can then interact with each other and share bookmarks too.



Lycos IQ

## Tagging

The tagging system on Lycos IQ is also used to find topics that are related, .e.g., going from the “India” tag to the “Independence” tag will open up a wider set of questions and answers, while going from the “India” tag to the “Bhagat Singh” tag will give more accurate results. The tagging system can also be used to tag anything else like user profiles etc. The top ten tags on Lycos IQ are history, trivia, music, IQ, science, health, general knowledge, law, food and geography.

## Bookmarking

The bookmarking facility on the site allows users to store and share links to useful sites which they may come across during

their daily interaction with the Internet. This means that a Lycos IQ user can come back to the site at a later date, log in and access the sites they have stored on their Lycos IQ account. All these can be added into the tagging system so they can be later referenced by everyone.

### **Asking A Question**

Lycos IQ works in the same fashion as Yahoo! Answers in this regard, though it would be necessary to state that Lycos IQ was started much before Yahoo! Answers. To ask a question, you need to again register an account with Lycos and sign-in to use the service. Once you are there, you can then click inside the Question field to type in your question. The question can then be answered by other Lycos IQ users. The users can also rate each others answers and if you happen to be the author of the question, you can rate the answer separately. Another differentiation from Yahoo! Answers here is that, you can give your opinion on the answer provided by fellow users. Even visitors to the site are allowed to post questions. While doing so, you are asked to enter your e-mail address to which a link is sent in order to activate the question and publish it on the site. Very interesting indeed.

Once again we asked the same question we did on the previous two Web sites. The first answer came quickly, it was informative and precise. Then two full days went by without any luck. It seems like there aren't many users using this service or not many users on the service are into the dancing jig. Either way, we were left with mixed feelings.

### **In Sum**

When you first log onto Lycos IQ you can be intimidated by the entire information overload on the site. As you gradually start using the service though, you will find that having all the information on the front page is indeed a good idea. If you are someone who regularly uses different computers to access the Internet, you will find the Bookmarking service to be a boon. The interface of the site uses pleasing colours and allows guests to ask questions too.

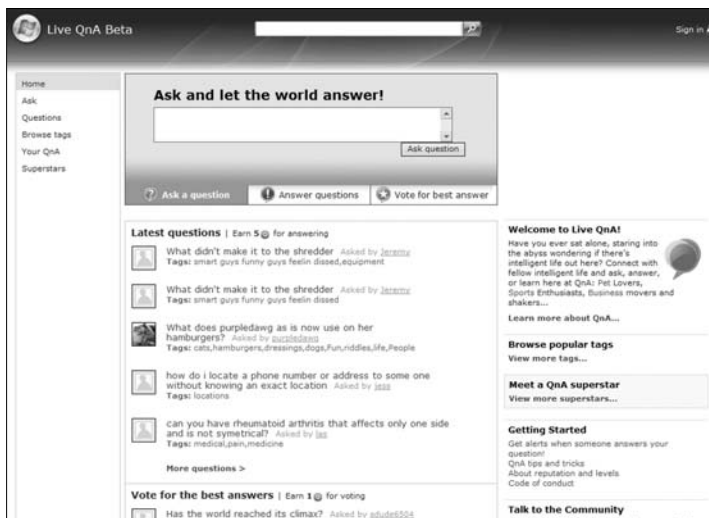


### 6.1.4 Live QnA (<http://qna.live.com>)

A part of Microsoft's Live services, the Live QnA service from Microsoft allows users to ask questions and reply to other user's queries. Like its Lycos IQ counterpart, the Live QnA site also supports tagging of questions. This is another no-frills site that accomplishes the simple task of answering each other's questions with aplomb.

#### Logging In

Signing into the site is fairly simple. All you have to do is sign into your Microsoft passport account and you are in. Unlike Yahoo! Answers, the only way to participate in the questions or on the community message boards is by signing into the service.



The Microsoft Live QnA site

#### Tagging

The tagging feature on the site is similar to that of Lycos IQ. The only difference is the ability to tag mature content. When framing a question, if you feel that the question may be inappropriate

for underage kids, you can tag it as “mature content”. This will ensure that any user with an under 18 Microsoft passport account will not be able to view that content.

### Answering Questions

Doing this is relatively straightforward, just clicking on a question opens up a text-box where your answer can be written and submitted. Another interesting point to note is that the site does not allow users to edit their answer after it has been submitted as this would then allow the system to be abused. When any question or answer is reported as being inappropriate and violating the Code of Conduct, the Web site reserves the right to delete the content. The user also has the opportunity to comment answers of fellow Live QnA users.

### Ranking System

The Live QnA site has a ranking system of Q's and stars. Q's are used to rank Windows Live QnA users in the community. They are given out by the community users based on the answers you give and the number of times your answer has been voted as 'Best Answer'.

#### The scoring system on the site goes thus:

Sign into QnA	1
Vote	1
Vote for winning best answer	4
Rate completed question	1
Answer a question	5
Give best answer to a question	20
Violate code of conduct	-50

### Community

On the Live QnA site, you can participate on the Message Boards to connect with fellow QnA users. It is a place where users can put their feet up and relax and not worry about the competition and ranking system.

Once again, we went ahead and asked our usual fast becoming favourite question, “I have two left feet and would like to know if dancing is a talent or can it be learnt?” There wasn’t even a tag created for “dancing” yet, which leads us to believe that the site is yet to take off. Answers were received quickly, some informative and some plain cryptic like, “dancing only takes rhythm and coordination. Spelling is another thing altogether.” We felt like strangers in this community. Having said that, since the site allows you the option of putting the question to your MSN Messenger contacts, which we admittedly didn’t choose, your questions may be answered more quickly.

### **Live Alerts**

The user can setup a Live Alert to be notified when a reply has been posted to his question or if someone else has also answer a same question or commented on it. You can also subscribe to alerts for a tag where-in the Web site will mail you an alert every time new content for the tag is created.

### **In Sum**

The site is very easy to use and very intuitive. As soon as you log-in with your Microsoft Passport account, you can start off without having to familiarise yourself with the layout. The QnA Superstars section brings to the fore the community behind QnA Live.

### **6.1.5 AnswerBag (<http://www.AnswerBag.com>)**

Founded in July 2003, AnswerBag is one of the leading social Q&A Web sites in the world. The site boasts over 156,000 members and claims to have no duplicate questions in its database.

### **Signing In**

Akin to all the other sites reviewed above, AnswerBag also lets users sign-in and create a profile for themselves. With that done, users can participate in the question and answer sessions on the site.

### **Answering And Asking Questions**

A user who has created an account can ask and answer questions,

The screenshot shows the AnswerBag website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Social Q&A', 'Expert Q&A', 'Local Q&A', and 'Shopping Q&A'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'Enter keywords (diet, gardening, etc.)' and a 'GO!' button. The main content area is divided into 'Categories' on the left and 'Latest Q&A' and 'Needs Answers' in the center. The 'Latest Q&A' section shows three questions with their respective answers and timestamps. The 'Needs Answers' section shows questions that are currently unanswered. On the right side, there's a sidebar with 'What is Answerbag?', 'Answerbag Blog', and 'Topic of the Day'.

### The AnswerBag Web site, in all its glory

and suggest new categories. The users can rate the answers as “helpful” or “not helpful”. A “helpful” rating will give the answer or question points while a “not helpful” rating will take away points. Users will achieve levels as they keep accumulating points. Users can also flag questions or answers as “Wrong Category”, “Nonsense”, “Spam/Offensive”, and “Duplicate”. Moderators on the site then review the questions or answers that are flagged by users and if they agree with the whistleblower, they give him/her 5 points. These questions or answers may then be deleted or changed by the moderators. The site also allows answers to be commented upon.

When a question is submitted to the site, it can be categorized under different sub-categories like Arts, Autos, Business, Computers, Electronics, Finance, Food & Dining, Games, Health & Fitness, Hobbies, Home & Garden, Kids, Legal, Life & Society, Real Estate, Recreation & Sports, Relationships, Science, Social Sciences, Travel and Outside the Bag. Categories such as Crazy

Stuff offer the often need humor to stay on the site for that much longer!

What is unique though about AnswerBag is that it allows you to add images and YouTube or MySpace videos to your answers or questions! What is more is that AnswerBag also lets you subscribe to your questions via RSS apart from the regular e-mail system.

### Community

To foster and enhance the competitive community feel, the site owners conduct various competitions on the site related to answering questions of users.

### Innovations

The founders at AnswerBag are truly at the cutting edge of social technology. They have an application to integrate with FaceBook (reviewed earlier on page XX) and a widget, which you can stick on your MySpace account or any other Web page for that matter. The news on the street is that AnswerBag will soon release its API's to the developer community to create custom applications for the site, which will act as extensions and enhance the user interface of the site.

### In Sum

AnswerBag was easily the best Question and Answer based site we reviewed. The interface was amazingly intuitive; the sign up process was quite simple and straightforward. The introduction of silly categories is a brilliant move. It injects the right amount of humor to

#### Ask a question

Add the Answers Application now to ask and answer questions on Facebook, and see the questions your friends are asking so you can help!

[Add the Answers Application](#)

The AnswerBag application being used on a FaceBook profile

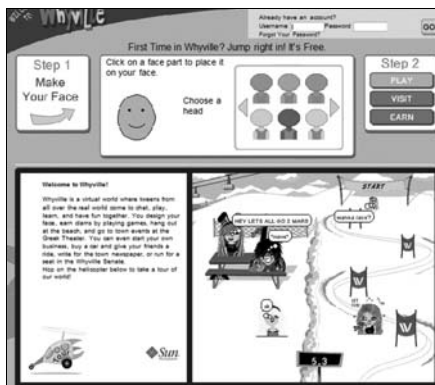
compliment the seriousness on the site. Being *Digitians*, we were also very pleased with the “geek” factor of the site.

## 6.2 Specific Course Oriented Websites

Gone are the days when distance learning required you to log onto a Web site, book in one hand, trying to comprehend what the “lecturer” was saying over a chat-room on the Internet, full of “students” chatting to each other in the room. These days social networking sites have forayed into this domain to cash in on the freely available user content to keep their courses up-to-date and providing that additional personal touch to their “students”.

### 6.2.1 WhyVille (<http://www.whyville.net>)

A 3D, virtual education site geared towards preteens and teenagers, Whyville’s goal is to teach its users about the values of science, business and entrepreneurship through various games and role-play which are available on the Web site. The game is reported to be one of the most popular virtual worlds on the Internet with an online player base of 2.27 million users. There is also an events notice board which lets you socialize with other WhyVille users on the site.



These days, kids have all the fun!

### Logging in

To access Whyville, the user has to first make an avatar of him/her. Once that is created, the user can then go about participating in the games on the site which teach its users key real life skills. You can do a lot more once you have registered for a free account on the

site. Once you have logged in, the welcome page has a well illustrated section to let you know about the community and its various sections. It is designed keeping in mind the demographics of the community, i.e. pre-teens.

### **Salary**

Once you have a registered username and are logged in, you have the opportunity of earning virtual money by playing the various educational games that are available online. Your score in the game determines the amount of virtual money you earn. Your salary gets paid on every new day that you log into the site. The virtual money on WhyVille is called “clams”. Clams can then be used to buy specialised equipment like face parts for their avatar or projectiles which can be used in the games on the site or furniture to decorate their virtual space on the site. Users can sell their “face part” drawings on the online store called “Akbar’s Face Store” and receive clams in return.

### **Government**

Users can participate as City workers to conduct a variety of chores for the virtual WhyVille city. In return they get paid a salary. Just like in the real world, WhyVille users can sign a petition and if it gets enough votes, the petition is polled amongst its members. If the polls favour the petition, it goes to the WhyVille City Hall for the City Workers to consider making it a law.

There is also a process in place to select a senate every 3 months in WhyVille which is again completely dominated by the community.

### **The Games**

WhyVille has games such as Solstice Safari, The Skater Game, Balloon Race, Virus Design Lab, and the Spin Game, which is designed to teach kids the concepts of science and how to handle money better in a controlled and fun way. Users who have the most number of clams are well respected in the community and new ways of earning clams are always encouraged in the community by

having those users featured on the WhyVille Times, a newspaper created and managed by WhyVille users. Recently, the virtual world had a planetarium setup in which users could walk into and learn about stars and the various constellations in the sky.

## In Sum

The site is primarily designed with kids in mind. We were impressed by the security measures put in place to avoid any malpractice. Things like getting parental permission before getting access to a chat room and tips on avoiding scammers and spammers were good to find. Also, in-game security in the virtual world was also very impressive. Tools like “Silence”, “Vaporise”, “911 Report”, and a language filter ensure that your child is safe and well protected when interacting with strangers.

### 6.2.2 Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com>)

A product of the most used search engine provider, Google Groups offers a free electronic mailing list as well as the ability to make groups and discuss specific topics. The advantage of using Google Groups over any other similar service is that you can access Usenet groups dating back to 11th May, 1981.

## Logging In

You can log into the site by entering your Gmail or Google account username and password. Once you are in, the site requests you to



The Google Groups Web site



make a profile for yourself. Your profile page allows other users to see what groups you belong to and what discussions you have participated in. Some people don't like this functionality and they can choose to make a limited profile or have their profile completely disabled for view by others.

## Groups

Once you have logged in, you can start off by browsing the various groups on the site or by searching for a specific group. We searched for a group for "Electronics Design" and sure enough, we found one (<http://groups.google.com/group/sci.electronics.design>). The groups on the site allow users to interact only in the areas of their interests. Google Groups also searches for usenet groups, which are displayed with a slightly different interface than that of groups on the Google Groups site.

The groups can again be classified under various categories. The owner of the group can classify whether or not anonymous users can post without joining the group. Another functionality unique to Google Groups is that you can choose to have your group opted out of the group categories and searches, thereby making it completely private. When groups allow anonymous users to post, the author's e-mail address is displayed in place of his name. Google Groups scrambles the e-mail address so that it is not "harvested" by e-mail bots and other crawlers on the Net. In order to view a post author's e-mail address, the user has to click onto his name or his scrambled e-mail address after which he is asked to enter the information of a "captcha" image to prove that the user is indeed a human and not a program trying to grab e-mail addresses.

Topics in a group can also be "starred", just like in Gmail. Every post can be rated a maximum of 5 stars and based on its rating, the post moves up in hierarchy in the topic.

## Criticism

Google Groups has come under some criticism from its users who state there is not much of a difference to indicate between when

they are accessing a Google Group or a Usenet group. Also, during our browsing of the Web site, we found a lot of links that were inappropriate for minor audiences. Also, since Google does not actively moderate the Web site, there are a lot of topics that have completely useless threads which not at-all related to the questions at hand.

### In Sum

Though the concept of providing search capabilities to usenet groups seems interesting, the real meat lies in the pudding, i.e. The content in the groups. It seems that the Web site needs to be moderated and inappropriate content needs to be filtered out in a timely fashion.

### 6.2.3 Experts Exchange (<http://www.experts-exchange.com>)

A site for the IT professional and home user as well, Experts Exchange, founded in 1996, is a place where all your computer related problems are answered.

### Logging In

Getting into the site is rather troublesome. All the sign-up links on the site redirect you to the premium membership services page. Why should anyone do that if they can get free membership, we ask? We knew that free membership on the site was not blocked just yet. We found the link obscured under the “Become an

Expert” section, on the right hand column of the sign-up page. After having signed up, we proceeded to explore all the sections of the site.



Professional help at your service

### The Sections

Experts Exchange is truly a site for the

geeks. The categories listed there are: Microsoft, Apple, Internet, Gamers, Digital Living, Virus and Spyware, Hardware, Software, IT Pro, Developer, Storage, OS, Database, Security, Programming, Web Development, Networking, Other and Community. Each of these categories is further divided into various sub-sections and guarantee that you will find the category of your choice.

### **Posing A Question**

When the user asks a question in the relevant sub-category of a site, he gets answered by the experts. The user is then expected to choose one or more of the best answers that sorted his/her problem. When the best answer is selected, the user is allowed to grade the author of the answer in the order of "A" being excellent and "C" being average. The user can assign a point value to the question, the maximum being 500 points. According to the Expert Exchange guidelines, the maximum point value for a question can be 500 only if the question requires a high degree of skill and specialisation and saves the user time and money. The minimum point value that can be awarded is 20.

### **Look And Feel**

The site has a very modern look to it. The navigation system is easy to use and the colours are pleasing to the eye. Being a site for the *geeks*, it seems a tad strange that the site should have such a graphic heavy interface. The system of awarding points has been custom built and is patented by the Web site.

### **Criticism**

Like most popular Web sites Experts Exchange has had its share of critics. Users of the site complain that premium membership users often award the maximum number of points for their posted queries in order to get faster replies, in spite of the queries being of intermediate or beginner level. The fact that the Web site seems to hide its free membership service from the general public and only allows the same on the notion that you consider yourself an expert seems biased to us.

## In Sum

All said and done, the Experts Exchange is one of the best content specific, knowledge based Web sites around that enjoys a large fan following. The moderation on the site is good and all replies mostly conform to the topic of the discussion thread. After Google Search, this seems like the best place to head to for your computer related problems.

### 6.2.4 Donation Coder (<http://www.donationcoder.com>)

A site that allows you to hone your computer programming skills, Donation Coder is the place where you also have the opportunity of contributing to donation-ware software by providing them with small funding. The philosophy of the site runs on the idea of people who love computer software and are willing to contribute their resources for the betterment of programming in general.

## Logging In

The only way to register on the site is by making a donation to the site via PayPal. Currently you can donate any amount to become a

HOME | Blog | Software | Reviews and Features | Forum | Specials | Help | Donate

DonationCoder.com  
for software connoisseurs

Reviews and Features

**ABOUT OUR REVIEWS**  
We will accept no payments or advertisements in return for a positive review, nor accept commissions on sales through this site. Your donations make these reviews possible; please support this site.

**OUR MISSION**  
Our intention is to focus on finding you those rare unknown gems and the best programs in each class.

**SIGN UP NOW**  
Join DonationCoder.com now to guarantee access to exclusive member benefits.

**SOFTWARE REVIEW SHOOTOUTS**  
Some of the most comprehensive comparative shootout reviews on the internet. Are you a software junkie? Do you stay awake at night wondering if you're using the best tool for the job? Unlike most review sites, we write comprehensive Software Shootouts. Our job is to pick a category, test every program we can find in that category, identify the very best programs (whether they are freeware, shareware, or retail) and help you figure out the single best tool for the tasks you care about. It's that simple.

- NEW Giant Word Processor Roundup in Three Parts - Updated June 14, 2007
- Icon Tool Shootout
- Notetaking Software Roundup #1
- Image Management Tool Shootout - ACDSee Pro Update
- Image Management Tool Shootout - Main Review
- Best Dialog Extender

URLSnapper Has Fans  
H.S. says:  
"This is by far one of the most useful programs I've ever used. I've always hated having to edit source code to try and hack out a link to a media file..."  
Read the rest

For the programming connoisseurs

member but in the future, the premium membership charges are going to be fixed at US \$50 (approx. Rs. 2023). If you only wish to participate on the forums then you can create a free account which will work only on the forums section of the Web site.

### **The Sections**

Donation Coder has three main sections to the Web site: Software Downloads, Reviews and Features and User Forum. Based on the user's preference, they can either download freeware/donationware products to test or volunteer to catalogue the features of software in a review. Apart from that, users can also learn new languages or better programming techniques in the site forums.

### **The User Forum**

The forum on the site allows users to interact with one another, enabling users to comment on other's work and getting comments and suggestions from other users about their work. Sub-categories like "Mouser's Zone", "Coding Snacks" and "Other Programs" allows users to post their programs online for review and comment by others, thereby improving the skills of the users.

### **In Sum**

Donation Coder is tight knit community of software connoisseurs who donate to each other's pet projects. We like the whole feel and ideology of the site. Minimalistic navigation menus and quick loading Web pages are the hallmark of Donation Coder. The forums are one of the most active places on the Internet for software professions trying to learn a new language or improving their skills. The idea of giving out free software is also very promising to us. The site is funded primarily by voluntary donations from its users and describes that it is in no mood to go the venture capitalist way... we wonder why?

### **6.2.5 UClue (<http://uclue.com>)**

Launched in February 2007, UClue is a site started by the researchers of Google Answers. The idea was conceived when Google decided to shut shop on its Google Answers service. The site enables a user to get his questions answered by an expert for a fee.

## Logging In

To start using the site, one has to first login. If you don't already have a username then you can register for a free account. The registration process seems fairly simple and straight forward. Having done that, the user can proceed to asking a question.

Questions on the site are charged between USD \$5 to USD \$250 (about Rs 200 to 10,000). The researchers at UClue guarantee that a question will be answered within 21 days, if there is no answer within that timeframe, the user receives a refund. Also, if

The screenshot shows the Uclue website interface. At the top left is the Uclue logo with the tagline "got questions? (beta)". At the top right, it says "Browsing as anonymous. Register or Login" and "Mon 9 Jul 2007 - 12:45 am GMT". Below the logo is a search bar with a "Search" button. A navigation bar contains links for "Home", "Ask a Question", "Categories", and "Browse Questions".

The main content area starts with a "Welcome!" section. It includes a message: "Welcome to Uclue, a paid answers service (FAQ)." followed by a list of bullet points:
 

- Everyone is invited to browse, register and ask questions. Your feedback is welcome.
- Former Google Answers Researchers (only) may contact us to register as Uclue researchers.
- Uclue is in beta test, and the site is undergoing rapid development.

 Below this is a list of languages: "We are pleased to answer questions in: English, German, Spanish, Tagalog" and "Wir freuen uns, Fragen in folgenden Sprachen zu beantworten: Englisch, Spanisch, Tagalog, Deutsch" and "Con gusto responderemos sus preguntas en los siguientes idiomas: inglés, español, tagalogo y alemán" and "Kinapagaliak naming sumagot ng mga tanong sa mga sumusunod na wikang: Ingles, Aleman, Kastila, Tagalog".

There are two columns of content below:
 

- Recently answered questions (more)**: A list of questions with star ratings, such as "Which is the MOST BORING Spectator Sport? ★☆☆☆☆", "MBA for IT professional", "Online surveys", "Where can I find new old stock watches from 70's and 80's ★★★★★", "Research on the NGO sector - Russia", "Blogging in the UK and Germany ★★★★★", "The Two Greatest Words in the English Language ★★★★★", "Domain name - Price query ★★★★★", "Is this company legit? ★★★★★", and "Getting an email address from ebay".
- Browse by Category**: A list of categories including "Arts and Entertainment", "Business and Money", "Family and Home", and "Health".

## Asking the experts was never so easy

the user is not satisfied with the answer provided, he/she can within 30 days, initiate a clarification process to refine the answer to his/her satisfaction before seeking a refund.

There are various categories to choose from which you can either ask questions or browse the answers for interesting questions. The categories on the site range from Business and Money to Family and Home to even Science and Mathematics.

## Community

The UClue community consists of the UClue researchers who answer most questions and commentators, i.e. Users that sign up to the site and can also comment on any question to clarify the question. The UClue community is not moderated; however, any content that is deemed inappropriate by the site users and can be flagged for review. This content is quickly acted upon by the site owners.

## Advantage Of UClue

The advantages of using UClue over any other content specific social Web site are great. The user's questions are answered by professionals who are supposedly experts in their respective careers. Also, every question gets answered within 21 days. Another advantage of using UClue is that you will rarely find irrelevant answers to questions as is the case on some Web sites reviewed earlier. The UClue Web site hires only former Google Answers Researchers into the UClue team, thereby ensuring that the quality of standards for every answer is up to mark.

## In Sum

UClue is a good idea for people who need a place where they can get fast, professional, high-quality research for a price. It is a place to head to when you need to learn concepts quickly or you need information about a particular topic. UClue fills a specific niche for such an audience quite willing to pay a price for that.

# Bookmarking



**Y**ou come across tons of content online in the form of text, photos and video when you surf. It's impossible to remember URLs of the every page or site you've visited for future reference. Thus far, you've done this by adding these links to your browser's favourites. But what happens when you want to access it from another computer or share your favourites with friends, or the world in general?



## 7.1 Introduction

---

The concept of "Favorites" has evolved from a time where all links were just bookmarked in your browser. Now, bookmarking sites offer services that let you register, store your bookmarks, organise them and categorise them in the way you want by adding tags. Most importantly, these sites give you an option of keeping those bookmarks private or accessible by the public.

Bookmarking services usually show the bookmark creator's name and link to his/her bookmark compilation. This makes it easy for visitors to connect with other individuals by accessing and sharing bookmarks of similar interests. Most of these sites have user-contributed content - visitors can only view the bookmarks and comments, while only registered members can vote, rate and comment on a particular post.

Thus, like-minded individuals can unite, create communities based on their common interests and discover new Web sites through mutual exchange of bookmarks. Thus this activity has been called 'Social Bookmarking'. Today, social bookmarking is spreading like wildfire. People check their feeds and bookmarking accounts simultaneously for the latest news of interest.

For all such sites, registration is essential to avail of features like rating, voting or commenting. However, some sites offer lot of features even without registration. We have some jargon that needs to be explained first.

### Tags

Tags are single word labels that are assigned to bookmarks in order to organise and remember them. For instance, all links of news stories or articles related to iPod, iPhone, Final Cut Pro, Mac OS X or Safari can be given a common tag - Apple.

### Tag Clouds

A tag cloud is the visual description and random placement of

tags on a blog or Web site

### Linkroll

A linkroll is like a list of the links in the way you want them to appear on either of the sides on your Web site and/or blog using a script or HTML code.

### Tagroll

A tagroll is list of tags which you wish to put up on your blog or site with the help of script of HTML code.

### Bookmarklet

A small button made up of JavaScript to be embedded in a browser on the Personal Bar for bookmarking the visited content directly from its native page. This Bookmarklet eliminates the need to visit the home page of a subscribed bookmarking service.

In this chapter, we'll review the most popular bookmarking sites.

## 7.2 General Bookmarking Sites

The best part of storing your bookmarks online is that they're accessible from any computer. Most of the big sites are have basic features that remain common- services to store/save links and share with others.

### 7.2.1 Del.icio.us

URL: <http://del.icio.us>

The social bookmarking scene went viral when Del.icio.us was founded by Joshua Schachter in late 2001. Yahoo! acquired



Bookmarking links and find out how popular they are.

Del.icio.us in December 2005. Its popularity has spread like wild-fire.

Del.icio.us is a decently designed Web site, but sometimes appears unorganised. You'll find a host-list on its home page which has 'Popular' and 'Recent' pages bookmarked. This hotlist indicate the popular trends amongst the people using Del.icio.us on the Web. Also there is a Tags list where popular tags can be found. You have to register to begin with. The features offered by Del.icio.us can be used to maximise the bookmarking experience on the Web. All the features mentioned below can be accessed from the 'Settings' link next to your login name.

### **Bookmarks**

The registration will require three steps - Filling your Details, Installing Buttons for your Browsers (Internet Explorer, Opera, Firefox and Safari) and Button Tutorial for using the buttons. You can check out the Hot List on the home page or view your bookmarks from 'Your Bookmarks' located on the top of the Web page. The bookmarks saved will carry a batch showing the number of people who've saved the same link as well and in case of the items your bookmarks the text indicating number of people - 'saved by 44 other people' is highlighted in pink.

After you finish registration and installing buttons, you have the option to import/upload your bookmarks from your browsers (IE, Opera, Firefox or Safari). Once the buttons 'Del.icio.us' and 'Tag' are installed. You can start saving your bookmarks by clicking on the button. Click on the button to go the Del.icio.us page with all your bookmarks listed. By clicking on the arrow on the button, different bookmarking options as well as help is available. Select the Tag button to directly 'Tag' a link.

You can skip the button installation if you just want use the Webpage. The Web site URLs can be fed in the 'Post' Menu option below the 'del.icio.us' mast-head or go directly to <http://del.icio.us/post>.

All these bookmarks will be visible publicly and if want them available only to you, select 'Private Saving' option from the 'Settings' Menu. Also the number of items per page can be customised to 10, 25, 50 or 100.

The procedure for uploading your browser bookmarks in HTML form is well explained and steps are easy to follow. Likewise, back-up all the online bookmarks can be done in HTML format if one needs. We somehow couldn't get why one would even need to back up online bookmarks!

Also your bookmarks can be integrated with your Facebook profile. A Greasemonkey script at <http://doiop.com/script> is available while using Google Reader in Firefox.

## Tags

Tags are the one-two word descriptor labels used by people to categorize the Web links. The collection of all these tags on a page is known as 'Tag Cloud'. At del.icio.us, users can also categorize their bookmarks using one-two word descriptors called "Tags".

For instance, a person surfing information on Apple's iPhone can store all the links, videos or podcasts by labelling them as 'iPhone' or 'Apple' tag. Like wise when you selected a tag 'iPhone' or 'Apple' you'll get all the respective links. One can assign as many tags to the bookmarks and also those tags can be renamed or deleted later.

Also you can 'bundle' the similar tags together. For instance you've tags on Windows, XP, Vista, Internet Explorer, MS Office 2007 and others to one single bundle by naming it 'Microsoft'. Different Tag options are provided to customize the way you want to view tags on the left side of 'Your Bookmark' page. Using tags can help you to find all the links related to that tag.

## Networks And Subscriptions

Connect with like-minded friends, relatives, colleagues, and other

people by joining their Network, or simply add a network by name. Even you can make your own network and assign privacy settings to it. Networking aids you in sharing and discovering new Web sites as well as information by sharing your bookmarks with others. That's the purpose of bookmarking.

Subscriptions to Tag lists helps you keep updated with new links and keep track of bookmark in that particular tag. Also you can customise a 'Network Badge' for your network. By checking out the badges you can browse the list of bookmarks saved by others and share with time simultaneously.

### **Blogging Tools**

The blogging tools available allow linking Del.icio.us to blogs by using JavaScript or HTML scripts on your blog. The bookmarks can also be published on your Web site or blog using Linkrolls and Tagrolls. Either can be customised using the various display options available. An experimental feature -Daily blog posting, automatically posts entries to the user's blog every day with the bookmarked links. This feature is currently supported on Movable Type, WordPress, TypePad and others popular blogging platforms.

The homepage, tag cloud and the bookmark items might appear shabby and untidy to few people due to the blue fonts on a white background. Still, it's a nice and user friendly site for saving your bookmarks with basic and easily usable features. If used properly, Del.icio.us can be interesting for travel planning, books, research, movies, blogging and many other things.

### **7.2.2 Stumble Upon**

URL: [www.stumbleupon.com](http://www.stumbleupon.com)

StumbleUpon is the very popular amongst human Net crawlers who want to check out new Web sites everyday, save links and share them with other people. Over 2.7 million users are using StumbleUpon currently. The site was founded by Garrett Camp, Geoff Smith, Justin LaFrance and Eric Boyd, and in May 2007, eBay bought it over.

The popularity of StumbleUpon grew because of its toolbar which offers TV-remote like features with channels. The idea is that you flip through sites and pages the way you flick through channels on a TV when you surf. There are categories for every interest, and you can specify your interests when you register.



Discover new websites recommended to you by your interest and preferences.

The collaborative filtering and opinions from like-minded users helps you decide whether a particular site is good or not. No searching hassles either because you are taken directly to the sites of your interest. Let's take a look at the main feature of StumbleUpon - its toolbar.

### Stumble Toolbar

After registration and selecting the categories of your interest, you'll have to add StumbleUpon toolbar to your browser. Currently



Feature packed toolbar for quicker stumbling...bookmarking.

Internet Explorer and Firefox support StumbleUpon toolbar. The toolbar is the Unique Popularity Proposition of the Web site.

Let's say you're a gamer and you've selected Games as your interest. When you click the ~Stumble~ button on the toolbar, it will take you to a gaming site recommended by other StumbleUpon users. If you like where you end up, just click the thumbs up button to save it to your collection. If you don't like the site, click the thumbs down button.

A number of other options are embedded on the toolbar like the 'Send To' button to e-mail the link to your friends. The Channels button gives you a drop down menu of channels you might want to stumble upon, such as pages that friends recommend, news, photos, videos, Stumblers, wiki, Web sites and key words. You can customise appearance and the channels from the 'Tools' button.

### **Home Page Activities**

After you log into your StumbleUpon account, four major tabs are available—Home page, Web sites, People and Videos. You can connect with friends, make a post on your blog (profile), customise your page, and look for the pages you liked.

Invite your friends from your Hotmail, Yahoo!, Gmail or AOL mail accounts. From the preferences menu on the page you can change the categories of your interest and edit your profile. You'll also find a tag cloud consisting of your interest topics. The StumbleUpon toolbar allows you to discover, rate and share bookmarks without any need to go to the home page.

### **Web Sites**

When you're on the home page, click on the Web sites tab to go through the recently popular Web sites. From the tag cloud on the right choose any topic of your choice. Say you've chosen 'Linux' then you'll see recently popular Web sites on Linux topics. You can read the views by clicking on the speech bubble below the bookmark description. Next to it is the tags which are separated by commas. So you can also browse Web sites via tags.

On the People tab you can find the online Stumblers and featured groups for you to join. You can also view Top Stumblers and browse through their favourite links. Likewise you can also view Videos from the recently included video service. This lets you stumble upon good videos from sites such as YouTube, Google Video, and MySpace.

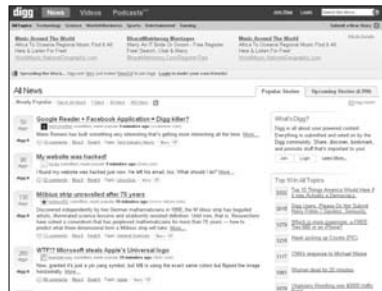
## Random Stumbling

Stumbling upon sites randomly is what gives StumbleUpon its name, and this takes you to random sites of your interest. Over time, StumbleUpon adapts to likes and dislikes, and you begin to love every site that it takes you to.

Recently, a StumbleThru feature was started which allows the users to browse through the pages of listed Web sites such as CNN, PBS, BBC, Wikipedia, MySpace, YouTube, Blogger and others. More Web sites will be added to this feature in future.

### 7.2.3 Digg.com

Digg.com is a popular Web site amongst users enthusiastic about technology and science. Digg was founded by Kevin Rose in December 2004, targeting tech-savvy and science interested people to share all content in the form of news, videos and podcasts on the Web. As it became popular, the topic base expanded. Now Digg has six major topics - Technology, Science, World & Business, Sports, Entertainment and Gaming. Each one of them has set of sub-topics listed under them. Whenever you come across news that is interesting, and want to share it with others, just 'Digg' it! That is Digg's ideology.



Digg out what news do people find hot and are marked by other people as well

Here, users decide what is the best content - links are submitted by users, and casual reviewers who come across the links then 'Digg' (vote for) it. The more a link is 'Dugg' the more it is promoted on the home page.

You have to register to Digg or submit stories, to comment about stories or to make a history of stories you dugg.



The site has a good colour scheme and the interface is user-friendly.

### **Bookmarks Layout**

Popular stories and Upcoming stories are listed on two separate tabs. You can browse through the stories based on popularity within a stipulated time. You can comment on bookmarked links, blog about them, e-mail and bury them.

Stories are displayed as a title, the name of submitter with a small avatar, the time within which it became popular and the link to the full story. A short description of the story follows.

If one of the items that has been Dugg up is a duplicate of another story, is spam, is categorised wrongly or is just lame, you can vote to 'Bury' it. You can select the appropriate action you wish to take from the drop-down menu at the end of each bookmark description.

Submission procedure for a new story is quite simple. Click 'Submit a New Story' and paste the URL in the box given. Then give a story title (75 characters maximum) and story description (350 characters maximum). If someone has already Dugg the link you will be informed.

Another way of submitting is to install the Community Digg Toolbar. Go to <http://digg.ourtoolbar.com> to get it. The toolbar has the Digg drop-down menu to select the different options listed. It also features a pop-up blocker.

There's also an RSS feeds indicator button with a drop-down menu that lets you quickly read the subject, mark all items as read-unread, refresh for new items and even delete feeds. The submission button - a blue circle with a question mark - leads you directly to the submission page.

### **Sharing**

A network of friends can be created by inviting or finding them on

Digg. The appealing stories can be Dugg and e-mailed to anyone. You can also find like-minded people by reading the comments about Dugg items.

### **Digg Tools**

Digg offers six different Digg tool modules for you to integrate Digg into your Web site - Digg buttons and badges for Web sites/blogs, adding Digg News to your site/blog, integrating 'Digg This' button in the site/blog, adding buttons to see Digg articles on the top of Google search results and enabling video submissions from your sites. You can also download the Digg API and create your own Digg tools.

### **Video**

In case of the Video, a snap-shot box is available while you browse through the other videos listed. If there is a "Play" button in the box next to 'Digg it' then you can click on it to see that video in the same window. Otherwise you have to follow the link and watch it.

### **Podcasts**

Podcast episodes dugg from all over the Web can be found here. Almost every pod cast episode listed has "Listen" or "Watch" button to listen/watch it. New podcasts can be found and added from the Podcasts page, but the service is still officially in a beta stage.

### **Labs**

Digg Labs offers certain tools like Digg Spy, Big Spy, ARC, Swarm and Stack for getting the real-time functions. The Digg spy is their real-time tracking system which displays list of stories Dugg. Also there are API contests regularly held to keep the developers and programmers active in developing APIs for Digg.

### **Advanced features**

If you click on an article's yellow-button that has that has the number of Diggs listed, you'll be led to new page with numerous options. Details about the news story are also available along with the discussion carried out in comments. Besides comments, one

can a list of people who dug or blogged that particular news story to know about their other links and interests. You too can blog that news story if you wish, or you can e-mail it to other people. For your online reader, blog or Web site you can subscribe to RSS feeds of Dugg sites for a particular tag/topic.

Digg has been in the news couple of times for rude, silly or offensive comments made against stories. It's so popular that when users made posts suggesting that Google was buying Sun Microsystems in 2006, Sun's share prices fluctuated.

The next version Digg 3.0 will be scaled up to handle 10 times the traffic it already does, have new categories, and list "Top Digg Users" on Digg. So stay tuned. Till then keep 'Digg'-ing!

### 7.2.4 Netscape

Do you remember Netscape Navigator, the browser? You probably do. The portal Netscape.com founded in 1994 was acquired by AOL on November 24, 1998. In June 2006, the Netscape portal was redesigned and a social news portal was prepared, similar to Digg. Netscape news portal has community driven (albeit moderated) content on its portal. Netscape has eight people who act as 'Anchors' to monitor the site 24 hours a day. The Anchor team consist of James Marcus, Ryan J. Budke, Karina Longworth, Eliot Phillips, Alexia Prichard, Fabienne Serriere, Dakota Smith and Helene Steinberg. These Anchors recommend certain stories which are displayed in the 'Netscape Anchors Recommend' Box at the top on the home page. They also filter stories posted by users for spam.



Check the hot stories submitted by users and how many voted for them

Along with the Anchors, a team of thirty-seven Scouts who work part-time submit stories that might interest the Netscape users and visitors. Scouts act as moderators and remove spam and redirect stories to their original links.

Netscape has 33 Channels (Topics) listed for users' choice on the left of the page. Below that lies the Netscape Tracker which shows frequent update of the stories posted by the users and next follows list of Top Netscape Contributors. Registration is free and required when you want to vote for, submit story or give comments on any stories which you come across while surfing. Basically meant for those Social bookmarking of enthusiasts who wish to look for, save and share the news reported anywhere on the Web.

### **Bookmark layout**

On the home page you can find the 25 most popular stories. The popularity of the stories is decided by the number of the people voting for them. Like Digg, at Netscape you can cast your vote for the stories which appeal to you. Register to create a new Netscape account or sign in using your AOL Screen Name. OpenID is also supported.

The control panel, accessible after you log in, contains tools to submit a story, upload a video, finding new stories, checking your inbox and checking if any friends are online.

To submit an article, click 'Submit a story', add the story URL, story title, story summary (350 characters max), select the appropriate channel and then assign tags to that story. Also, if you feel that a certain story is irrelevant or old just click 'sink' to vote against it.

You can add the Netscape Bookmarklet to your browser to directly submit the story from any page. From the Hot Tags cloud you can select the tag of your choice to read news stories and articles on that subject.

## My.Netscape

Post registration, you can go to My.Netscape to customise your content. You can add modules to customise your home page. You can change the colours, number of articles displayed and the content settings here.

## Friends

When you click on Friends Online, you are taken to the 'My Friends' section. Here, you can keep the track of your friends' activities on Netscape - including activities of friends of friends, members with similar tastes, etc. You can track the history of your own participation using the My Participation option.

## APIs

Netscape offers APIs for its users to maximize its beyond its home page. APIs include a 'submit/vote at Netscape' link to add items in the RSS Feeds to Feedburner, direct voting from your Web page, direct video streaming links for your Webpage, downloadable podcasts in iPod compatible format, Netscape Bookmarklet (JavaScript) and Browser extensions (Firefox), etc.

Despite its buggy Navigation, and similarity to Digg, Netscape is still amongst the top 10 news bookmarking sites.

## 7.2.5 Diigo

URL: [www.diigo.com](http://www.diigo.com)

Diigo was launched on July 26, 2006, and takes social bookmarking one step further. Besides bookmarking, tagging and sharing Diigo allows clippings, in site annotations by sticky notes and full-text search. This makes it a powerful tool for bookmarking on the Web. It has been ranked fourth in



Bookmarking can be fun by adding annotations through highlighting, sticky notes and comments

Top 10 Research tools by CNet.com. Like the site mentions, 'Diigo is about Social Annotation. Highlight, annotate, share and interact on any Webpage.'

The word Diigo is the abbreviation for 'Digest of Internet Information, Groups and Other Stuff'. It is an excellent research tool and it makes the Web more interactive by making it writable, shareable and participatory.

### **Basic Working**

The basic working of Diigo is no different than other social bookmarking sites. Register, install a Bookmarklet or toolbar and start bookmarking. The toolbar works on any browser.

### **Diigolet and Diigo toolbar**

The Diigolet has following buttons - Bookmark/Share, Highlight, Sticky Notes, Comments and More. Using Bookmark/Share option you can save a bookmark in the pre-populated form and even mail that link to your friends using the Forward option. Of course, you have options to set your bookmark privacy, share the bookmark with groups (if you've joined any) and even post a comment using that form.

Select a text between 5 to 2000 characters (non-white) and click 'Highlight' on the Diigolet to highlight the text for your reference or sharing with others. Add sticky notes to a Web page and then share it with group and keep track of your notes.

The Diigo toolbar is similar to the Diigolet but bundles some advanced settings. Click on 'Options' to change settings here.

### **My Groups**

Diigo groups provide a unique platform for users to interact, share and discover new areas amongst any groups of people via bookmarks, sticky notes, comments and the forum. You can join featured public groups from the Group Categories listed or create your own private/public group.

## Differences

Diigo has certain distinct features which set it apart from other bookmarking sites. It features text highlighting, adding sticky notes to the page, archiving exact Web page copies, sharing a picture collection, full text search and caching of bookmarks which maximise the user's bookmarking activity. Also there is user forum where you can initiate and take part in discussions. Diigo recently started supporting clippings and videos and Flash content.

Like other bookmarking sites, Diigo offers blog integration features - Linkrolls and Tag clouds, which can be added to your Web site or blogs. Even after disabling (not Un-installing) the toolbar or Diigolet, you can still do interactive bookmarking. Just right-click and you will find the 'Diigo' menu listed. You can import your Bookmarks from Del.icio.us or other sites. An export feature is also provided.

Diigo might not be suitable for beginners, and highlights and sticky notes can be disturbing when first going through a Diigoed page. However, once you get used to it, it's hard to use another bookmarking site.

## 7.3 Special Interest Bookmarking Sites

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Not all bookmarking sites are meant for the masses, and some sites have focussed on special interest groups. Here we'll look at a few.

### 7.3.1 uLinkx

URL: [www.ulinkx.com](http://www.ulinkx.com)

uLinkx, pronounced 'u links', is a Web site for video and music bookmarking. uLinkx was launched in May 2006 at Fremont, Canada by founders Saket Kumar, Arvind Singh and Rabindra Gaurab. Basically, it's a place to search videos, save them, share videos and socialise with like-minded individuals by sharing playlists and videos.

The site currently supports only IE (6+), Firefox and Opera for



Watch videos, create their playlists and make friends by sharing your videos and playlist

video viewing. You can search for videos from the millions available at YouTube, Metacafe, Google, MySpace, Yahoo!, MSN, Revver, Reuters and more. Create an account to make a playlist with the videos you like, and use the five self-explanatory tabs - Home, Videos, Playlist, Socialize and Help - to use the site.

## Search

Searching for videos is easy. You'll get results of videos that match your search query from the sites mentioned earlier. Just click Add to add a video to your playlist. The uLinkx search engine also tracks your activity to provide you with better results as you continue to use the site.

If you don't know what you're looking for, use the Tag cloud under the Videos tab to find videos of interest. There's a Family Filter option for those under 18.

## Save

You can use the 'Create Playlist' sub-menu under Playlist tab and



start adding videos you like from the home page or the search results. You can bookmark any video you find using the Bookmarklet widget available for Internet Explorer and Firefox. You can also share your playlist and bookmarked videos by e-mailing the links to your friends.

If you're worried about privacy, knowing that your search history is viewable only by you should calm you down. The paranoid can still turn this feature off by visiting the History page and changing the appropriate setting.

### **Socialize**

You can invite your friends to the site or make friends with existing users - you can find them by viewing the new users list or just searching for people. Once you've found people you like, you can subscribe to their playlists to see videos they add. You can also earn money here, by using Google AdSense on your profile page. Just add your Google AdSense account details (Google AdSense ID and Google Channel name) and the site will do the needful. So basically if a lot of people visit your page and click on the AdSense ads there, you earn money.

The site provides RSS feeds, bookmarklets and widgets. Adult content is not really monitored well here, because the site hosts none of the videos itself. This also means that sometimes things break when the video hosting service removes a video but uLinkx is still linking to it.

### **7.3.2 CiteUlike**

URL: [www.citeulike.org](http://www.citeulike.org)

CiteUlike is an online bookmarking service for academics to organise, store and share academic material that they come across. The site came into existence in November 2004.

The site is like a personal library where you can see the papers of your interests, post articles, browse articles by other users, create a watch-list and share your bookmarks with other users. The

system currently supports a number of well-know publications such as Amazon, NASA Astrophysics data systems, Nature, New Scientist, Science Direct, SpringerLink and many others. The best feature is that it grabs the citation details automatically from its supporting sites. For non-supported sites one has to enter details manually.



Academicians would love to save, find and share the stuff the need for research.

## Getting Started

The home page will show you very few links under the navigation menu. But after you do the free registration, you will see a lot more. Menu items include Post article, Your Library, Your Watchlist, Journals, Groups, and Experimental features.

At the home page you can choose any one of the different subject areas listed on the top of "Everyone's Library". The home page will display a mixed list of recently posted academic papers for you to browse. Classification of papers is available on subjects such as Computer Science, Biological Science, Social Science, Medicine, Engineering, Economics/Business, Arts/Humanities, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Philosophy and Earth/Environmental Science.

You can search by title, tag, author surname or journal name. On the right of the home page lies the Tag cloud to choose topic or filter one out of them.

## Post

If you have a lot of research material that you've found whilst researching a particular topic, you can post it to the CiteUlike for

future reference. To help you find posts again, and also help others, you can add tags to each post.

### **Library**

You can save academic papers by clicking on their respective academic paper link. When the details of the paper appears, click on the hypertext link under the 'I like it!' heading. This leads to the filing form which you've to fill and eventually the article will be posted in your library. The information saved in your library is secure.

You can Export your library to either BibTeX (a tool for formatting references) or Endnote (software tool for publishing and managing bibliographies). The site is full of mostly biological and medical papers, and other science and engineering subjects.

### **Journals**

CiteUlike claims to have over 11,000 journals organised for reference. You can browse through the most recent issue of the journals published online by searching or looking through them in alphabetical order.

### **Groups**

Click on Browse groups under the Groups menu on the left of the home page to join any of the various available groups. Create a group by click on Manage Groups option below it to create a new group.

### **Other Features**

When a tag from the Tag cloud is selected, a page with recent papers classified by the selected tag is displayed. Along with that a 'Watch' button is displayed on the top. Click on it to create Watchlists to keep track of the subjects of your interest. Subscribe to the respective subject using RSS feeds, and remember to click on 'Private' before you add notes that you don't want other to see.

The Web site looks outdated, but the information it contains is valuable to those who need access to academic papers. The site is also ad-free, which is a rarity these days.

### 7.3.3 Blogg-Buzz

URL: [www.blogg-buzz.com](http://www.blogg-buzz.com)

Blogg-Buzz is a bookmarking site exclusively for bloggers. It's an interactive platform to share, discover and promote blogging. The Web site was launched by youngsters Shivaranjan Bhoopathy and John TP from India in January, 2007. The site was considered a



Saving, sharing and voting of blog posts bookmarked only by bloggers

Digg clone, but the blogger focus soon ended that perception. The service is in an alpha stage, but is getting popular.

After a story or blog post is submitted, other bloggers will read it and 'buzz' it if they like it. If a post gets enough buzzes, it's promoted to the home page. The features on offer are very similar to most other bookmarking sites. You can register only after your blog is verified, so you ~have~ to be a blogger to be a part of this site.

### Getting Started

Once registered, you can submit new posts. If you've come across interesting blog posts, you can submit them to Blogg-Buzz. Other users will read your submitted story and will buzz it if the story interests them. However, certain guidelines are listed which must be followed. These guidelines are that the submitted content ~must~ be a blog post, linked directly to the source, be properly categorised, have an appropriate description, and should not be a duplicate entry.

You can e-mail posts you like to your friends. From your profile

you can track your complete activity history right from posts submitted to posts buzzed. The home page displays the top buzzers and the categories for blogs complete with RSS Feeds.

### **Top Buzzer**

The top buzzer is not the person who buzzes the most, but instead is the persons posts who received the most buzzes. This encourages quality of content.

### **Socialize and SPY**

Adding comments and discussing particular blog posts can help you make friends. You can also socialise amongst the top buzzers and other users by sending Private Messages. This site has a unique spy feature using which you can see the details of the buzzing activity happening around. You can spy on comments, and upcoming or popular stories.

The home page looks like copy of Digg where all the popular blog posts submitted by people are listed. The orange-coloured interface may not appeal to everybody. Since the site is in Alpha stage, more distinct features can be included to make it stand out amongst hundreds of other bookmarking sites.

### **7.3.4 LibraryThing**

URL: [www.librarything.com](http://www.librarything.com)

If you're an avid book reader, this site will definitely interest you. LibraryThing was launched on August 29, 2005 by Tim Spalding, a Web developer and publisher. LibraryThing is communal cataloguing service of books for users who look for them online. It's like creating a virtual library of your books. The site is still in beta stage.

This site claims to have over five million books online on members' shelves. Search for books on various topics from Amazon, Library of Congress or 78 other resources around the world.

## Getting Started

A one step registration will initiate your journey towards millions of books. The free membership limits you to 200 books. If you wish to upgrade to a paid membership, click on 'Your Profile' tab and choose 'upgrade to paid account'. That will take you to a page

where you can choose either a Yearly (Rs 460 approx.) or a Life-time (Rs 1,150 approx) membership. Of course you can pay less or more by choosing the figures quoted in the drop down menu.



Search the books you like and organize them on your virtual bookshelf

## Add Books

Go to the Add Books tab for options to search for books. You can search by title, author, ISBN, etc. You can also search by keywords and use the tags to find books of your interest.

When you get search results, click on the arrow for more details about the book. Click the book to add it to your catalogue. When you do this you are shown your recently added list of books, and a number of people who've added the same book.

## Your Library

Click on the Your Library tab to display all the books you've added to the catalogue. You can customise the columns and order of books by using the menu buttons. If you wish to edit any information, double-click or click on the pencil button. Click on the printer icon to take a printout of your catalogue. You can share your catalogue with others by clicking on the icon that looks like a human. You can also build a graphical shelf-like library from your catalogue.

## Groups and Talk

You can create or join groups listed on the Web site. Groups are classified based on newest groups, most members, top languages, most active, most read, etc. If you want to keep a track of a group, choose the 'Watch' option. After joining or creating you can start talking and start sharing libraries. Also check out the Zeitgeist option to spot shared books.

## Share

You get a unique URL that lists your library - so if your username is "username", your library URL would be [www.librarything.com/catalogue/username](http://www.librarything.com/catalogue/username).

Another site called aNobii has similar features, but lacks the group feature which is more exhaustive in LibraryThing. LibraryThing is booklovers heaven, and a must visit for all booklovers.

## 7.3.5 Clipmarks

URL: [www.clipmarks.com](http://www.clipmarks.com)

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the HyperHistory website. The main content is a horizontal timeline from 1500 to 2000, with various historical figures and events represented by colored bars and text. The timeline is divided into decades, and the names of figures are listed below the timeline. On the right side, there is a sidebar with a portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and a brief biography. The sidebar also includes a 'To more lifelines' section with links to 'Rousseau', '1712 - 1778 French Philosopher', 'Revolution', 'Top 14 people in history', and 'Color Profile'. At the bottom of the page, there are navigation tabs for 'Index', 'Science', 'Culture', 'Religion', 'Politics', and 'Hard Copy'.

See live updates of bookmarks clipped by you and others in Web 2.0 UI

You don't have to save a full Web page for a mere two lines of trivia you come across a site. Just Clip it! Clipmarks, based on the concept of making the Internet your own clipbook - allows you to save clips of information you find on various sites and also lets you share them with your friends as well as other members of the site.

Clipmarks, run by NY-based team, with over 20,000 registered users is a Web 2.0 service with an eye-candy feature ..... on its home page. You have to begin with installing the Clipmark toolbar or button for cutting, saving and sharing bookmarks of information which you want to save and share. Its annotation is similar to Diigo but Clipmarks provides live clips on an interactive platform at its home page. You can see news, blog posts, shopping offers or recipes clipped by users.

### Getting Started

Register and install the Clipmarks toolbar for Internet Explorer. Once installed, start clipping. Wherever you come across any text, video, picture and want to bookmark it, just click the Clipmark button and it will turn from green to orange. Now use the Save, Blog, Email and Print buttons on the toolbar and then select the content to be clipped. Double-click to clip the entire paragraph or just select a few lines holding down the right mouse button. Next, hit the Save button to publish your content - a fill-in form pops up where you can add details such as title, tags and description. These clips can be made public or private.

Public clips have a 1,000 character limit, but private clips, e-mailed clips or printed clips have no restrictions. You can publish the clipped content to a blog directly by choosing the Blog button on the orange toolbar. The clip-to-blog option currently supports Blogger, WordPress, TypePad and Vox.

On the home page you can sort clips by choosing the following options: Newest, Pops, Comments and Popular. Pops gives the users the ability to rate the clips.



### **My Clippers**

When you add other site members to your own friends list - it will be referred to as 'My Clippers'. You can now view their bookmarks the way they've been sorted. Click the 'My Clippers' drop-down menu and check out the My Clipper Mix -mix of Clips and Pops.

This site supports RSS Feeds, as well as linkrolls for sites and blogs. You can view users' clips, without registering, from the homepage, and search for clips by topic. You can also comment on clippings.

This site is a handy tool for saving small tidbits of data or trivia from the Web in any form. Its navigation is simple, though Clipmarks toolbar is rather long and takes up wanted space on the browser. The content clipped isn't as exhaustive as Digg, but the little snippets are interesting.

# Going Mobile

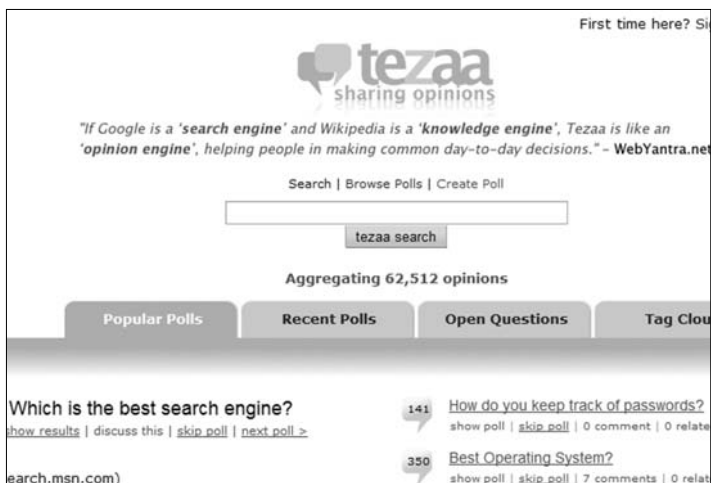


**S**ocial Web sites are foraying into new frontiers of social networking—to your mobile phone. Yes, that little gadget you are carrying in your hand or pocket right now is capable of connecting you to all your friends... on the move. Here we will review some of these early movers in the mobile social networking scene.

## 8.1 Tezaa (<http://www.tezaa.com/>)

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Can't seem to choose between blue shoes or black shoes? An Activa or a Nova? Tezaa is a mobile community site that runs on only one simple theory, making online polls. The site emphasises that you can make better choices by knowing what your peers think.



A slick Web site with slicker content

When signing up, all you have to do is enter a username and a password and enter an e-mail address. Then click on the sign up button. Tezaa will then send you an automated e-mail reply in which you have to follow a link to activate your profile. Once in, you can view the popular polls currently posted on the site. You can browse through all the polls, vote for them and even create a new poll anonymously. You can also search for a poll and see if it already exists to help him choose better. If you have an open-ended question can post in the section called "Open Questions" where the user community will suggest the best answers. You can also create a poll, customize it and add it to your Web site or blog.

This site has one of the best interfaces among Indian sites. The mobile version of the site though looks cluttered on the screen and it could do better by removing some links and information off the mobile site.

The funny part is that the business model is also being decided by a poll on the site. Currently the answer "Sell Merchandise like t-shirts, caps" seems to be the current favourite amongst the six options.

Tezaa is definitely addictive, we kept logging back onto the site every once in a while to vote for the interesting online polls that we saw.

## **Polls**

Once you are logged into your account, you can either search for a poll or create your own polls. Answering a poll does not require you to be logged in but to create a poll you have to be signed into the service. Polls made can also be tagged with keywords so that their chances of appearing in a search are greater.

While browsing we came across serious polls like, "which is the best institute for stock market education?" To some really funny ones like, "Who deleted that last poll I posted?" with all the answering options being "Joe Baran" only!

While we posted our poll, asking about what users do to keep themselves updated, we found only a few takers, with talking to friends getting the most votes. We find that popular questions about music and actors, etc., seem to get more replies than their serious, thought provoking kin.

## **Community**

Once you get over the effects of continuously participating in polls, you will start noticing the community behind these polls. Tezaa allows you to see profiles of others in the community. These profiles contain all the tags you have created while making a poll

and other information that you might want to share with the community. It also shows your activity level on the site.

### In Parting

We found Tezaa to be one of the best mobile based sites which allows you to interact with others in a fun and addictive way. The site design on the mobile could be better but we are not complaining. Overall, a well made site that does a good job of getting together the "collective wisdom" of people. Good stuff.

## 8.2 Wadja (<http://in.wadja.com>)

Truly the first Indian mobile social community network, Wadja is a service designed to be used on any General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) enabled phone. Just like any internet based social networking site, Wadja allows its users to create an account with a profile and add friends to their network. You can also add photos or

The screenshot shows the Wadja mobile social networking community website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Travel, Photos, Music, Videos, Mobile, About, and Home. Below the navigation bar, there are several promotional banners and sections:

- Premium SMS Peru:** Largest premium SMS gateway for Peru. Reliable and professional. [www.mobiletextgate.com](http://www.mobiletextgate.com)
- Free SMS w/Video & Voice:** Free Live Voice Chat With New & Old Friends from Around The World. [Habitat.com](http://Habitat.com)
- Business SMS messaging:** Enable your business fast with PageOne's SMS messaging solutions. [www.PageOneSMS.com](http://www.PageOneSMS.com)
- Mobile Web, Made Easy!** Web to web, web to mobile, or mobile to mobile, Wadja keeps you connected!
  - Stay in touch with friends and family
  - Send free mobile inbox, SMS, and Chat messages
  - Share mobile photos, movies, and music
 Anywhere, anytime, from any device! Wadja, your mobile phone, and the web... All the world's a stage, let's take part!
   
 Buttons: Sign in, Join Wadja, Find friends
- Mobile Media, Made Easy!** Share your mobile media with the simple click of a mouse, no MMS needed! Just look for these little blue icons under any mobile media view page!
   
 Icons: e-mail, share, sms
- BOOK YOUR SUMMER HOLIDAYS WITH WADJA AND BOOKING.COM** (GREAT DEALS!)
- Funny SMS Non Veg Jokes:** Great Funny Non Veg, Veg Jokes Text Santa Banta, Dirty, Adult Jokes SMS. [www.9000.com](http://www.9000.com)
- Mobile Backup & Restore:** For carriers and service providers PII, SMS, MMS, Photos, Videos, etc. [www.mobile-rescue.com](http://www.mobile-rescue.com)
- Send Sma Messages:** Need Send Sma Messages Save on Gift Items. [www.smartee.com](http://www.smartee.com)
- SMS Cephe-Yuk AasanArleri:** Yuk AasanArleri Cephe AasanArleri Kranjery digi Platform. [www.emrmarketing.com](http://www.emrmarketing.com)
- User Profile:** Karik, Straight, Single, Looking for: Whatever, Gender: Male, Location: Chennai

The Wadja mobile social networking community

videos and edit fonts and colour of your profile page. To check messages, comments and friend requests you can visit your profile at <http://wadja.com/username>.

Wadja also has its custom Windows software for creating your own mobile site and uploading different media to the site. Wadja will host the mobile site for you. Completely free.

### Logging In

A user has to register before using all the services of Wadja. In order to do so, he can visit <http://in.wadja.com> on his mobile or computer and select the "Join Wadja" button, after entering all the regular details like name, username, password, e-mail address etc you can create a Wadja account.

## 8.3 Frenzo (<http://www.frenzo.in/>)

Another social networking site competing with Wadja in the same space is Frenzo. This Web site is a secure mobile community,

**frenzo™**  
MOBILE FRIENDS ZONE

home | guidelines | pricing | terms of use | help | contact

**Make friends. Chat. Share photos.**  
All from your mobile!

Frenzo is a secure mobile community for Indians, where you can:

- meet people who share your interests
- exchange instant messages
- store, tag and share photos
- express yourself with avatars and moods

50,000+ members joining every month  
100 million hits every month

Frenzo can also be accessed via the following operator WAP portals:

**Airtel Live!**  
**PlanetHutch**

Get started

sms **FRENZO** to **676767**  
(we will sms you the link to access Frenzo)

Meet people  
Thousands of new members joining everyday - meet lots of people

Options Select Back

Frenzo, another Indian mobile networking site

where you can meet people who share your interests, make friends, chat,

exchange instant messages, share photos and personalise your space with avatars and moods.

### Logging In

The way to access Frenzo is unique. You need to send an SMS to 676767 with the word 'FRENZO'. The Web site will then send you back a link to access the Frenzo site via GPRS.

### Pricing

The Web site is not free to access. Frenzo has worked out a pricing deal with the most popular cellular carriers in all circles. Pricing for the same are as follows:

#### Operator Pricing

Airtel (all circles) Rs.15 per 15 days (1 day free trial)

Idea (all circles) Free for a limited time period

BPL Mobile Free for a limited time period

Planet Hutch Free for a limited time period

### The Service

The Frenzo service is like a portal on your mobile phone. It allows the user to access a multitude of channels from one place on the WAP site.

As soon as you log into the WAP site, you are asked to create a profile for yourself. Having done that, you are asked to select an avatar, which is a cartoon depiction of oneself in the virtual world, from a list to depict your current mood. Once you have done that, you can go ahead and browse other users in the community and request for them to add you on their network. As more and more users accept your request, your network grows. When that happens, you can send out chat requests to any or all members in your network. Using the network, it is also possible to see who is online and in what "mood". This way allows users to interact with each other in real-time.

Another interesting feature of the site is its 'photo blogs' feature. Users can click snaps from their mobile phone cameras and upload them onto their personal blog space on Frenzo to share with the world. While uploading the photos, Frenzo gives users the opportunity to tag photos. You can also browse through the various photo blogs on the WAP site and interact with other photo bloggers in the form of chat sessions and private messages.

The Frenzo service is one of the fastest growing mobile based services in India today, aggregating over fifty thousand new members every month and getting over hundred million visits to its site in a month! You can now see the vast potential that lies in this market.

### **In Parting**

The look and feel of the WAP site felt good. The content on the site being geared towards real-time interaction with friends, we were distracted all the time (that is why this chapter is being written at 12:30am). The photo blog needs real time moderation as we did find some content inappropriate for minors. Thankfully there was a button to flag the blog in order to notify the people concerned. All in all, Frenzo has enabled us to finally move on from the PC to the mobile in our endeavour to connect with everyone, everywhere, all the time!

## **8.4 Yahoo! Mobile (<http://in.wap.yahoo.com>)**

The Yahoo! Mobile Service has been one of the first few Web based portals to launch a WAP service. In doing so, Yahoo! enabled its services to be accessed to be accessed from any device on the move. The Yahoo! WAP site currently supports the ability to read e-mails from the inbox and also compose new mails. Apart from the other download services, it also supports the ability to check your yahoo messenger contacts on the move. Though this service is in no way user friendly, since you have to keep re-loading the page to check if the other person has replied, it still is a step in the right direction.





### Dead and buried

### Logging In

Getting into the site is similar to doing it on the web. You enter your username and password on the front page and that takes you to another page where you can choose from E-mail, Messenger and other services of Yahoo!. If you do not have a Yahoo! id then you can only create it off the Yahoo! Web site.

### Messenger

On signing on, the messenger function of the Yahoo! WAP site displays all the groups that you have created. You have to go into each group, which loads a separate page every time, to see which of your buddies are online. If you want to chat with your buddies, all you need to do is click on their name and that will bring up a very arcane user interface to enter the text to your friend.

Once the instant message (IM) is sent, there is no way to know if your friend has replied or not, unless you reload the page. This can be very frustrating and annoying.

### In Parting

We feel that the messenger client on the WAP site should be improved upon by Yahoo! if they want to make better in-roads into the mobile social networking scene. The system that exists right now was cutting edge way back in 1997.

## 8.5 Social Voice Chat

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Chatting over the internet is now passé. To go beyond a step of this form of entertainment, Cellebrum Pvt. Ltd. is offering mobile phone carriers the ability to provide mobile subscribers with "Social Voice Chatting". Social Voice Chat is a service for mobile subscribers who wish to talk not only with known acquaintances but also to any unknown person without disclosing their identity.

### How does it work?

In a soft launch conducted by various mobile phone carriers across telecom circles, the service is started by the phone subscriber receiving a SMS asking him if he/she wants to make friends. Users register for the service by replying back on a certain number and are assigned a five-digit code by the system that also acts as their mobile number on the social network, thus hiding their real phone number. They can then dial a three-digit number and listen to other people describing themselves and try to reach them by dialling their code. Users getting the calls are not obligated to answer them.

Each such call costs Rs 3 a minute both for the caller and the receiver of the call. This was introduced to avoid gaming of the system where people would make long distance calls under the pretext of Social Voice Chatting.

It is said that unlike social Web sites, the demographics of the search cannot be defined just yet. Meaning, you get access to all the people who have registered for this service across the country and there is no way to pick and choose any state or telecom circle or any other demographic.

### In Parting

We feel that this idea has a lot of potential. Quite a few mobile phone users do not have a computer, let alone access to the internet. In such a scenario, the attractiveness of indulging in social networking for people who pay on an hourly rate for access to the internet would be all too great. Another moot point is the price of

each call. This is said to play a deciding factor in the popularity of the service.

The response so far has been good though. Cellebrum Pvt. Ltd. claims to have active subscriptions of up to 300,000 people spread across 17 out of the 22 telecom circles in India, with an average revenue of Rs. 100 per customer. Not bad, we think!

## 8.6 SocialLight (<http://sociallight.com>)

Imagine going to a remote waterfall on a camping location and your phone beeps to let you know that just around the corner there is a small cave you can explore. This is exactly what SocialLight does! A location-based social networking platform, it lets people connect ideas and thoughts and suggestions to real-world physical locations. It allows users to create, browse and



Who knew stickies could be so much fun?

share virtual "Sticky Notes" that can be tied to any location worldwide.

### **How does it work?**

You first need to sign up for a SocialLight account, the normal details like your name, e-mail address are asked apart from your phone number. You have to be over the age of 13 to use this service.

When you log into your account, SocialLight will ask you to create your profile, where you can enter your country and city details and other relevant information like your interests and hobbies. You can also allow known contacts to view your sticky notes, though this seems unlikely as Starlight is only starting to be used right now in India and not many people know of the service.

Once your account is created, you can use the map on the page to scroll to the location you might be in. SocialLight then sends you all the information relating to that place that other members have contributed.

### **The Sticky Notes**

Sticky Notes form an integral part of the SocialLight platform. When a user selects his/her location on the map, he is given an option to create a sticky note. The user can then add any information he wants to the sticky and uploads it onto the Web site using his mobile WAP browser.

While creating the sticky, the user is given the option of allowing it to be seen by everyone in that location or only his contacts. This way you are not spammed every time you update your location on the world map. A sticky note can also be labelled for containing mature content inappropriate for all audiences. Sticky notes can be made to promote businesses too. When a sticky note is sent to a user who is not on our contact list, the username of the author of the post is not displayed in order to protect their privacy.

Just a quick check on the India map found us 21 sticky notes already! So the idea seems to be catching on.

### **Contacts**

You have the option of choosing your contacts from your profile page on the site. Your contacts can view your current location on the world map and can view all the sticky notes you have submitted to the site unless you have explicitly switched off that function.

### **Channel**

In Socialight, a channel is used to form a community where users exchange sticky notes based on their areas of interest. These notes can then be viewed by other users of the channel if they happen to be in the same area where the note was originally created.

### **In Parting**

Though the site is in its infancy here in India, the idea is catching on rapidly. Right now there are not many sticky notes to really capture your imagination here in India, but once this starts rolling it will provide a whole new dimension to social mobile networking.

## **8.7 MocoSpace (<http://mocospace.com/wap2>)**

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Another entrant in the mobile social networking race is MocoSpace. Launched in April 2006, this mobile site allows users to make friends, upload photos and videos, blog from the mobile phone, review a product and tag user generated content.

### **Logging In**

MocoSpace has one of the simplest registration processes we have encountered so far. The site only requires you to enter a username, a password and an e-mail address. The username you specify identifies you on the site and is included in the URL of your profile. The Web site relies on browser detection techniques to deliver the correct con-



### Fast loading and fun to use

tent for your mobile phone. For older phones, the site delivers a WAP based Web site and for newer phones, the content is based on a WAP2 platform. If you access the site on the computer, the Web site detects this and renders a full HTML compatible Web site to the user.

### Categories

When you access the Web site, either via the phone or the computer, you can upload photos to your account. On the PC version of MocoSpace, you can upload the photos relatively easily by clicking on the "Photos" tab at the top and then clicking on "Upload". If you are on the mobile version of Mocospace then you can e-mail the photos to your MocoSpace account by sending the e-mail on a specific id. However, the photos will take a couple of hours to appear on your profile as they have to be approved, presumably to enforce the site's rules against copyrighted or inappropriate material. The maximum photo size limit is 300KB and the photos can either be in .png, .jpg or .gif format. Accessing these images on the mobile site renders these images to a size of 90 pixels while maintaining their aspect ratio.

Videos can also be uploaded from the "Videos" tab in the same way as photos are uploaded. The videos have to be in .3gp format and smaller than 300KB. This is very restrictive since it equates to only about 10 seconds of low quality QCIF resolution (176x144) video. All photos and videos are publicly available by default but you can restrict access to only your friends also.

The next tab is called "Options" which strangely leads to a chat room on the site. You can create your own personal chat room and add settings such as limiting access only to the friends in your network or allowing it to be an open chat room where any user can participate

The "Blog" tab offers rudimentary blogging features like a text-only input, no support to adding photo or videos and seems to be there just to add more number of features to the site.

In the "Reviews" tab, users can review anything. From cars to movies to songs to cities... you get the picture, don't you? Movie and music reviews are the most popular topics in this section. Other users can rate your review using the star rating fields.

### **In Parting**

MocoSpace is a very active mobile social networking site, the chat-rooms and forums being the centre of all activity. The mobile site works fast and users don't have to wait endlessly for pages to reload in the chat rooms. Our only grouse with MocoSpace is that it lacks a single distinctive feature to set it apart from the herd.

## **8.8 Mob5 (<http://mob5.com>)**

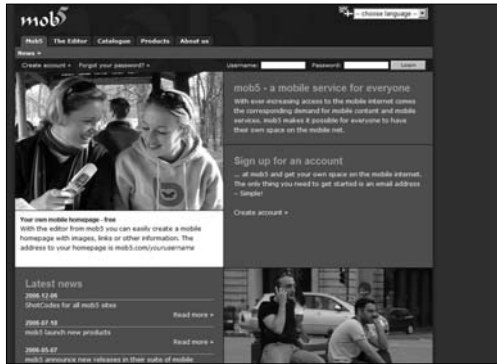
---

Speaking about mobile social networking, Mob5 does not strictly conform to those rules. We like to see it as more of a WAP site builder which has enough number of built in networking options to push it into the mobile social networking group too.

### **Logging In**

If you thought that registering at MocoSpace was easy, Mob5 takes the cake, with the cherry on top (a "Siddhuism" classic). You can register a new account on a PC via the Web site. All it asks you is for your desired username and e-mail address. Once you have accepted the terms and agreements, you are good to go.

You can create a WAP site using a very intuitive online editor which lets you make pages and add formatting to each page. The available formatting options are text blocks, images, the comment form,



Mobile social networking with a new twist

mobile Web links, "click to call" phone number links that dial out a number if the specified link is clicked on to and an e-mail link. You can add your own photos page too. Everything from the text size, to the background colour, text and link colours and centre, left or right align elements can be controlled. Everything can be moved around and tweaked endlessly if that's your style.

The WAP site editor is currently available on the PC Web site. However there is a note that promises a mobile edition soon. It is a good thing that the WAP site builder is so easy to use, because there isn't any online help available for it. Images can be uploaded by e-mail or MMS or directly through the Web editor. It is also rumoured that photo uploading will be supported by the mobile version of the WAP site builder when it is released.

Mob5 limits the user to upload up to 200 photos per site but you can have an unlimited number of WAP pages on your site.

The WAP site URLs are based on a sub-directory style, e.g. [http://mob5.com/user\\_name](http://mob5.com/user_name).

### Social Features on the WAP site

Mob5 WAP sites can have a shout-box or, comments page or a guestbook for visitors to leave behind comments for the owner of



the site. The users can add each other to their "link exchange" section and the site notifies the user every time there is an update to the user's page.

### **In Parting**

We found the whole experience of making our WAP site very interesting. It has a certain amount of "flaunt" value to it. The very impressive WAP site builder also does away with the task of scripting WML or x-HTML pages for mobile phone sites, giving the user a clean interface to play around with the endless possibilities.

## **8.9 Twitter (<http://m.twitter.com>)**

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If you thought you were well connected and networked because you had access to the internet, have a mobile phone and you blog; we forgive you for your utopian views. Until this writer stumbled upon Twitter, he thought the same. As the site puts it, Twitter is "A global community of friends and strangers answering one simple question: What are you doing?" The site allows you to answer this question from the Web site or via a mobile phone.

### **Logging In**

Signing up to twitter is not possible via the mobile site right now. You need to head to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) to set up an account there. The sig up process is like every other sign up process out there. Enter your full name, desired username, password, e-mail address and you are off.

### **Twitter-ing**

The site revolves around one simple question, "what are you doing?" This question can be answered from your mobile phone as soon as you login. We used Twitter for a week and we couldn't stop! In fact, this writer is still twitter-ing while writing this article!

### **Socialising**

Twitter allows its users to add friends to their accounts. Once you have added contacts, you can check to see what all your contacts

are doing from the WAP site or on the PC. If you don't wish to see "twitters" from random contacts, you can switch on filtering to receive twitters only from your contacts. You can also assign twitter to your AOL Instant Messenger Id and have the twitters appear in an IM window in real time.

You can use twitter either via the WAP site or via the various mobile twitter applications available at <http://twitter.pbwiki.com/Apps#Mobileapps>

### In Parting

The twitter service, in spite of being completely pointless is something that has gripped our collective imagination. It is a communication platform on steroids which far supersedes any IM conversation. The ability to instantly know what your friends are doing gives you the feeling of being completely networked all the time! It would be so much better if their SMS services worked in India. Also, the fact that you cannot run a search for your friends on the site is another bummer.



Addictive chirping

## 8.10 MobLeo (<http://mobile.mobleo.net/>)

There are bookmarking Web sites with communities which you can access on the PC on the internet, now wap sites are starting to crop up that offer users the same functionality. One of the first few entrants in this field is MobLeo. What MobLeo does is to catalogue all the sites that you have bookmarked while you are browsing using your phone.

### How does it work?

You need to first log into the MobLeo WAP site, after that is done; you need to go to the browsing tab which allows the user to enter a URL. When you enter a URL, the MobLeo site acts as a proxy to

the internet and connect you to the site via their servers. When the site is loading, you will notice a small toolbar at the bottom of the screen which allows the user to add tags and bookmark the page for further reference. As you keep browsing and tagging different sites, your bookmarks will increase.

To access these bookmarks, all you have to do is to log into MobLeo again from the drop down menu at the top choose "bookmarks" and select the "Go" button. Your stored bookmarks will appear. You can add

#### Sharing bookmarks on the go

and manage your bookmarks from the PC by going to the Web site [www.mobleo.com](http://www.mobleo.com) and signing in. There is also an option to share your bookmarks with the community. You have to first add anyone as a friend on your network and then you can choose to select which tags or bookmarks you want to share with them. You can also choose a random user and browse through their bookmarks.

### In Parting

The ability to browse through MobLeo's proxy ensures that sites that are not WAP enabled get optimised while they reach you. You can also switch off images using the toolbar at the bottom. If you are in a country like India, the ability to perform all the Web site functions like sorting tags and adding friends via the mobile is impressive because mobile browsers outnumber PC based browsers by a margin of at least 5 to 1 here. The only worrying factor for us is that most of our frequently accessed sites like Gmail don't work very well with the MobLeo service. It is said that as long as you don't have to visit a secure site, you can use the MobLeo browsing service without any hitches.

# Weird Networking Sites



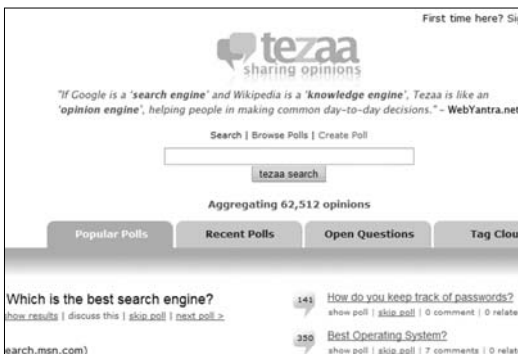
**N**ot everyone is alike—there are the eccentrics and the square pegs trying to fit into round holes. The Internet, being the ultimate democratic medium of them all, gives everyone a voice. And since social networking is basically about individuals, there are places in the virtual world where these folks with their somewhat offbeat interests can congregate. In this section we bring you a review of ten such social networking sites which can't be slotted in any other category. Welcome to the Weird World Web.

## 9.1 Global village

(<http://smallworld.columbia.edu>)

They say it's a small world, and the Small World project (<http://smallworld.columbia.edu/>) aims to prove it statistically. It is an online experiment by sociologists at Columbia University which aims to validate the theory that people are at the most separated from one another by six degrees of separation. This experiment is actually like a controlled chain letter where you have to contact a specific target person through e-mail.

The thing works like this: You go to their site and log in using your e-mail id and a password. After agreeing to the terms and conditions of the project you are presented your target person. Your aim is to contact that person through friends who live closer to the target than you. After your friend gets your e-mail there would be two options. If your contact knows the target then the chain ends and the result would be one degree of separation. But if the target is unknown (which is more often the case), your contact would forward the mail to a person whose location is even closer. And thus the chain continues.



Details of your target appear after you log in

Now what makes this networking site different from most others is that you cannot directly contact unknown people. Sure, your target is not known to you but you have to contact him/her through acquaintances. This provision takes care of privacy concerns. As e-mails are sent through the Web site only, they are not

visible to the public. You cannot dream up imaginary contacts and send mail as the recipient would be asked to verify you. Similarly, if you get a forward then the sender will have to be confirmed by you. So don't think of Google, it won't help you here.

Based on the results published in *Science*, the researchers concluded that it might not necessarily be a small world. Of the total number of 98,847 people who registered 24,163 distinct message chains were generated of which only 384 reached their targets.

The site design was clean and navigation was a breeze. There is a chat module (disabled when we visited the site). There is also a message tracker accessible from your MySmallWorld page where you can track your messages as they travel through the ether. Oh, and in case you are in the mood you can become a target yourself, with the addition of some more detailed information which would be publicly viewable. In either case sign up if you figure you have the stomach for navigating through the Byzantine alleys of social networking.

## 9.2 Dream Merchants

([www.matchadream.com](http://www.matchadream.com))

Ever wondered about dreams and their meanings? Freud certainly did, and in the process became the father of psychology. Even more, do you think some other person could have dreamed the same thing as you did? If you have been thinking along these lines lately, [www.matchadream.com](http://www.matchadream.com) is just the place for you.

This site is one of a handful which serves the dreamspace. As with other networking sites, you need to register free. Once that is done you are all set. Submit your dreams, keep a dream log,



Meet people who have the same dreams as you!

view and match your dreams and create Dream Circles where you can invite people who have similar dreams as you do.

Submitting your dream is only a matter of filling up a few fields like type of dream, time, recurrence, description and if you are up to it, an analysis. Now your dream gets saved in a dream log which is visible to other people. In case you want to match your dreams with others go to the Match Dream button and depending on your description the site throws up a table of similar dreams which other people had. Each matched dream has a match factor. The higher the match factor, higher the chance that the person could have seen the same type of dream you had. And there is one nifty utility which would help amateur Freuds psychoanalyze—a dream dictionary. Suppose you saw swathes of black in your dreams last night and now you are wondering what the hell that meant. Now wonder no more. Head over to the dream dictionary and type black. And get the shrink's definition without paying an arm and a leg. Cool, we say.

Keep seeing a person who sees similar dreams and feel you need to have a chat? Well that's why they made Dream Circles. You can create your own Dream Circle, which is a sort of a group or a community. Search similar dreams and then invite their dreamers to your Dream Circle. Alternatively you could get invited by kindred souls to join their Circles. Leave comments and feedback on others dreams, talk and connect with others and do all the things you are supposed to do at a social site.

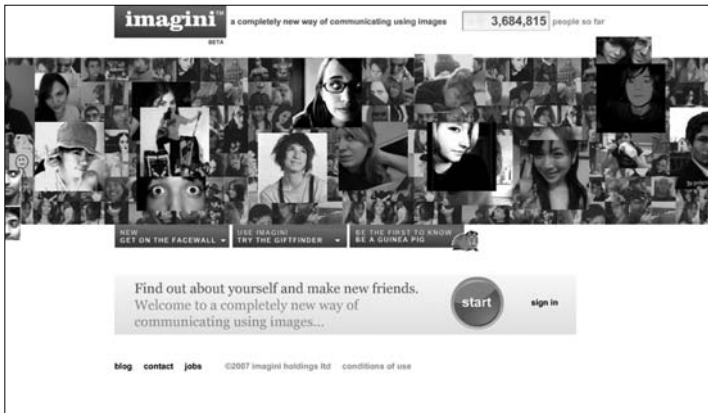
As regards the site design it could have been better. Though navigation is fine and links easy to follow the fonts and interfaces have an amateur look and feel, almost as if too little time was invested in the design. Which is no doubt a pity because this place has some interesting features.

If you are the type who like to wear your heart... er... dreams on your sleeves, then maybe you should make this your homepage. Then again, maybe you would be better off on the couch. Your call.

## 9.3 Picturespeak

([www.imagini.net](http://www.imagini.net))

Apart from the concept, the design of this site is terrific. Harnessing Web 2.0 technologies like Flash and good ol' JavaScript this unique networking site aims to connect people based on what they call Visual DNA. Kind of like connecting people who see similar dreams, only it's based on your visual responses.



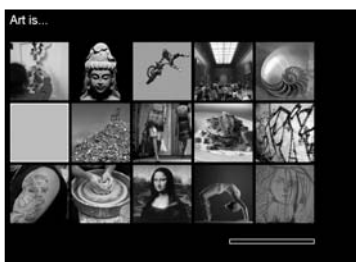
Imagini has more visual impact than you'd expect

The whole process of slotting your personality into categories like mood, habits, fun and love is achieved by image selection. That is, for your idea of art, you would see a Buddha, the Mona Lisa, a stunt motorcyclist, an acrobat, etc. All images absolutely unconnected, and also disparate. Select the one which tallies with your idea of art. That done, you would go to pages for My Music, My Type of Bedroom, My Drink, select the images which respectively fit the headings and sit back for a moment. For each category you would see your choices along with other images graded in terms of popularity. Some of your choices might be the most popular ones, some might not be. In any case, you would get a brief update about what type of person you are likely to be. Nothing serious, but fun to read nevertheless.



One thing which impressed us about the whole process is that you can do all this without being a member. This is unlike the majority of networking sites where it is compulsory to register before previewing what the site has to offer. If you like it enough go ahead for registration and get some more goodies.

A widget thingy, which can be attached to your blog or your My Space profile (in case you have an account!) is just a copy paste away. Update a funky mugshot of yours and you could find yourself on the FaceWall—an image gallery for newly joined members. Use an inbuilt messenger to contact your Imagini friends, post comments in a blog, be a guinea pig and test out new products. You also get a personalised URL for your profile, find the places which you selected as your favorite holiday destination and connect with friends of your friends.



Find your Visual DNA at Imagini

According to the site administrators about one million hits were recorded during March '07. Indians account for about 45,000 members or 2.1 per cent with Americans leading the charts in terms of popularity at 36 per cent. That the site is hugely popular can be seen in the numbers recorded by a counter on the top of the home page. Last time we checked, the counter showed 3,502,211 people on the site. And increasing, almost like the space counter on Gmail.

The interfaces are slick and uber cool. Navigation is very intuitive and even though the site is still beta not many bugs are apparent. The main problem seems to be the amount of time some interfaces take to load fully on slower machines. Registration involves using a screen name and e-mail id. Data like age, country, sex etc., can be revealed or hidden.

## 9.4 It's the money, honey

(<http://www.kiva.org/>)

In the old days, you needed to be a Rockefeller or a Ford or a Tata to be able to influence lives of people thousands of miles away. Not any more. With the advent of the Internet, even a teacher or a housewife can. Kiva is a social network that connects businesses in the developing countries in need of cash with people who are willing to provide loans. Using this site people have loaned to small businesses like a bakery in Afghanistan and a rice beer maker in Vietnam.

Kiva is a non profit organization which has microfinance institutions as partners in the developing world. These microfinance institutions solicit interest free loans through Kiva for local businesses. The featured businesses has



The Kiva homepage

details like name of entrepreneur, location, activity, amount of money, repayment range and purpose. People who are logged in can search for entrepreneurs to lend to. Once they have made their choice they have the option of loaning cash in increments of \$25 to the microfinance institutions who then pass it on to the business. Most loan requests are in the range of \$1,000 or less and almost all of them get repaid. Once a lender gets a loan back he/she can re-loan to the same business or adopt another entrepreneur. A portfolio tab enables lenders to manage their contributions and get updates on repayments. The homepage features individual businesses and lenders and it is updated frequently. The journal features success stories of people who repaid their loans and also recommendations from microfinance institutions for businesses seeking loans. Contact information is provided in all the cases. Security issues regarding wire transfer are handled through the use of Pay Pal account.

The unique part of this micro aid scheme is that lenders and borrowers can connect with each other. Many lenders were so impressed by the entrepreneur that they expressed wishes to pump in more money into the businesses. A case in point is New York Times correspondent Nicholas Kristof who met his business partners when he visited Kabul and saw for himself how his loans were helping people desperately needing cash.

Established two years ago by Matthew and Jessica Flannery, an American couple working as volunteers in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, Kiva has raised \$7 million in two years from more than 70,000 individuals and extended microfinance to about 9,000 businesses. It has also fostered numerous personal relationships between people from varied socio economic backgrounds—a very good example of combining philanthropy and networking.

## 9.5 Barbie Girls

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(<http://www.stardoll.com/>)

A large number of sites on the Net are unsafe for children. Not this one. In fact this site is developed for kids and teens, especially for girls with a yen for dressing up her dolls. Which every little girl seem to have. In fact most of the members on this site are from 7 to 17 years old.

Anyone older than 12 can become a member. For kids under 12, parental consent is required. Once you get yourself registered you get 25 Stardollars to buy clothes and accessories for your signature MeDoll. Your imagination is the only limit here as you can choose from hundreds of hairstyles, skin tones, nose shapes etc. Dress up the MeDoll in clothes of your choice using those Stardollars. Once your initial account is exhausted you can pay for more purchase using credit cards. Each member can have 10 celeb dolls on their profile page. These celeb dolls range from actors to singers to athletes to royals. Some are also offered free of cost.

Once you have your profile you are ready to venture into paper doll heaven. You could contact other members who have same celebrity dolls as you do. If you can't decide the best eyeliner for your doll ask for tips from owners of similar dolls. Chat with other members through the message center. You could also keep an online diary and write about whatever is going through your mind. And that's not all. A member has a guestbook where contacts and friends can leave messages and also a friend list.



Dress up your star doll!

This site, if not policed could be vulnerable to abuse. Since cash transactions are carried out Pay Pal is used for securing them online. Members are contacted by the staff on the site through the message center and such messages are highlighted distinctly. Usage of slangs and curse words are frowned upon and all such words are replaced with asterisks by the Bad Word Filter. Members are encouraged to use pseudonyms and provide only e-mail id and age. Posting photographs is discouraged and members who repeatedly break rules about usage of language or bullying behavior are expelled from the community.



Dress up Brad Pitt—or as many women would say, don't!

The site design is flawed and the menus are cluttered. The interface does not seem to be done up keeping the target audience in mind and is sure to intimidate the bravest of kids. Does this site measure up to its stated goals of providing wholesome entertainment to kids? Ask them. They are the best judges.

## 9.6 Meet Up

([www.43people.com](http://www.43people.com))

Part of 43things.com, this site connects people through tags. Log on to the site, write something about yourself, update a photo and sit back. Sooner or later some kind soul would stumble upon your story and tag you. Meanwhile browse the site for people having tags you find interesting. For example suppose you like stunt motorcyclists. Search for people with this tag and you might strike lucky. Or maybe you have a pen pal from Mongolia. Type Mongolia as the keyword and chances are you will have an online meeting with your Mongolian friend. Get the idea? Anything goes.

Apart from writing a story about yourself you can also write a story about others. These stories can be long or they can be short. When you want to meet people you have the option to write about why you want to meet him/her. These get added to your homepage and can be viewed by anyone. As your homepage grows bigger you get tagged more often and the search queries which use tags have greater chances of hitting your name.



Barack Obama's page at 43people

Celebrities, both dead and alive seem to have a large number of people wanting to meet them. People want to meet Mahatma Gandhi as well as the Dalai Lama.

Even you could be included in a placeholder page by long lost friends in the persons I want to meet list. If you stumble upon that go ahead and own your page (though you have to explain why you are who you say you are). In addition you can also search and add people to your page. When you add names of people you want to

meet you can contact other people who are in the hunt. The names of people who have met your target, if any are visible. If you are doing something (learning to play the guitar) add that to your page and meet up people who have either done it or who are still trying to get the hang of the chords. It even becomes more interesting when you are planning to visit a place. Tags allow you to either search for people who live there or have gone there. Possibilities are actually limitless through such linkups. The Hasselhoff is another feature which is like an update of latest meetings, stories, uploaded pictures and such other trivia.

To prevent incidents of spam, smackers are used. You could either earn smackers or spend them. To earn smackers you have to respond to people wanting to meet you. You spend them when you request a meeting. Without them you are stuck. The whole idea is to encourage responsible behavior. Children under the age of 13 are not allowed to join. Aliases can always be used to hide your identity, though this might prevent you from utilizing all the available features. Site navigation is good, though the FAQ could have been more detailed and informative.

## 9.7 Man's Best Friends

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(<http://www.gopets.net>)

This is one networking site with a character. These characters are 3D images of pets like dogs and cats. And you connect with other people using these pets.

Registration is either by invitation or public. When you register yourself for the first time you fill up a form listing your interests. Your virtual pet then visits other people who have the same interest as you do. This results in both of you making contact with each other and becoming friends. After this is done members are free to communicate in different ways. Downloading the GoPet client enables members to use IM. For people who speak different languages messages can be exchanged using GoPets icon based

language called IKU. Each pet has a travel journal which record its journeys and can be checked out by the owners.

The business model of this site is similar to Stardolls.com. Shells are the currency here. Shells are divided into three types—Gold, Pink and Green. Greens are most easily

acquired—you just get them by remaining active on GoPets. Pink shells are more valuable and you are awarded Pink shells if you unleash those creative juices and get cracking on making customized IKU icons. Writing messages and testimonials also increase the number of Pink Shells in your kitty. The Gold Shells are the top dog (pun unintended) among ‘em all and also the most valuable. You can buy Gold Shells only by real money (US \$, Can \$ and Euros). You can even earn shells when the friends you have invited to join GoPets transact on the site.



The GoPets homepage

Now that you have built up a nest egg what do you do? Simple, spend them. Go to the Shopping area and check out all the cool stuff for your pets. You could buy pet food, mats, drinking bowls, beds, accessories like rings—all sorts of stuff you might want to buy for a real pet. But these folks don't stop at that. You could even buy your pets potato chips and pizzas, teach them to strum the guitar or dress them up and play pirates ~ a la ~ Pirates of the Caribbean. In fact there is a whole gaming area where members can play games and earn shells. Names of top scorers are featured prominently in the gaming zone. And in case you are hooked to the cute critters you could adopt more pets by spending Gold Shells.

The community features on GoPets are pretty robust. GoLand is the map of the imaginary place where your pets and those of your friends roam about. Find out from the map how far your friends are. Forums for public discussion are available, a feature

which is pretty useful. Groups can be formed by members who have common interests. GoPedia, the GoPets Wiki is a community effort where you get everything you need to know about it. The proceeds from the sale of certain items go to charities. So far, \$12,000 dollars have been donated.

For a social networking site as niche as this GoPets have notched up impressive figures. The total number of users is 6,48,640. The site supports 14 languages, including English, Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Japanese and Russian. Active users are featured on the homepage. User experience is decent though some links are not intuitive enough.

## 9.8 Dark desires

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([www.gothpassions.com](http://www.gothpassions.com))

Are you attracted to ghosts, haunted castles, crumbling buildings, werewolves, vampires and dark tales of lunatics? Ever felt lonely because kids thought you were a practitioner of the Dark Arts and adults thought you needed help? Don't lock yourself into a room and start rereading Bran Stoker's Dracula. Instead navigate to Gothpassions.com and start making friends with like minded people around the world.

Part of Passions Network, a collection of more than hundred dating sites a member can be a part of one or more sites in the Network. Registration is free and the same log in ID and password can be used to access all the sites. Your profile should have a photo and a description. A nice lowdown about yourself dramatically increases hits on your profile when members use the search function to find people to connect to. You should also select keywords which best describe yourself. These keywords are important because common interest groups are arranged around them.

Communication among members is made through chats and internal e-mails. The system restricts you to only 10 e-mails per day



to avoid spam. This 10 e-mail limit rule does not apply to your friends on Gothpassions and you can chat with them till the Apocalypse or till your system gives up its ghost, whichever is earlier. A degree of secrecy is also enforced by keeping your pictures secret from non members and casual browsers.



Find your soul-vampire

Whenever you get a message or a notification you have a 'smooch' waiting for you. There are features like Gothic chats, webcam chats, audio chats, IM services, blogs and horoscopes. Forums are a big draw at Gothpassions and topics of discussion range from topics like Horror movies to occult and Goth poetry. Music videos can be uploaded to your profile and the other networking sites (MySpace, Flickr etc) where you spend your time can be added. Active and newly joined members are on the homepage and so are the active topics at the forums.

As regards user experience we were put off by the template. The placement of ads could have been more subtle. Instead they scream out and almost lead you to believe that they are part of the page.

This tactics might bring in ad revenue, but for users is pretty irritating. The links on the site are cluttered and the designers could have spent more time in managing real estate on the pages. Another problem is that the login facility is sometimes disabled. This is hardcore niche and is definitely not for everyone. But then again, our brief was not to find the site next door.